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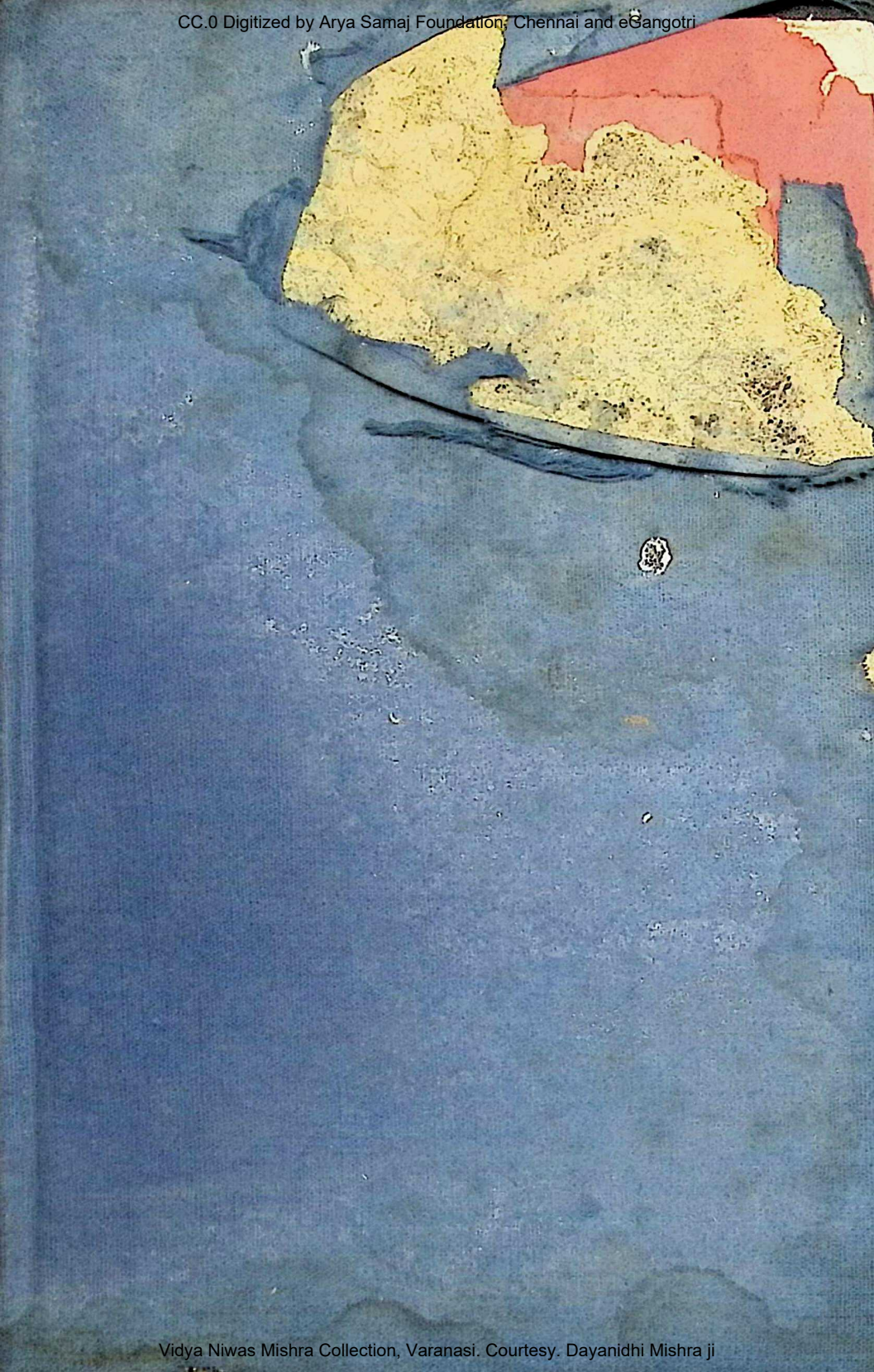

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# SOCIOLOGY OF SECRET LANGUAGES

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# SOCIOLOGY OF SECRET LANGUAGES

R R MEHROTRA

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
SIMLA

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# Preface

This monograph describes some secret modes of communication within the broad framework of the sociology of language. This aspect of language behaviour has not yet received the disciplined attention of scholars in our country, although one can easily identify it as a "strategic research site" which provides impetus and occasion for exploring new dimensions of a complex social structure and its linguistic remifications. My study of the secret parlances, included in this volume is a preliminary venture in this direction.

The monograph includes four studies in "speech fellowship" of certain closed groups who seek to conceal their communicative content from out-groups. The first chapter deals with some general principles and patterns of argot in relation to the deviant behaviour of certain criminal and fringe groups. The other three studies are heavily data-oriented and are based on my fieldwork among the *panda*, the *dalal*, and other professional groups, particularly those belonging to the city of Varanasi. This effort apparently assumes some knowledge of the Hindu social structure in general and the socio-commercial character of the city of Varanasi in particular. I deliberately choose Varanasi as the field of my investigations, for I have been intimately acquainted with the behaviour—both linguistic and non-linguistic—of its people for more than thirty years.

Besides Varanasi, some other cities of North India like Delhi, Mathura, Allahabad, and Gaya were also visited with a view

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to collecting comparative data. It is important to mention in this context that my intention in pursuing these studies has been purely academic and should not be construed as being motivated by the desire to expose the nefarious activities of the concerned groups. The last chapter describes the esoteric number names used by the silk merchants, the *dalal*, the *panda*, and the fruit and vegetable venders of Varanasi and a few other places in relation to the specific roles and professional requirements of the groups using them. An attempt has been made in this chapter also to give an account of *hattha*, the secret finger language of diamond dealers and the situations in which it is used.

The analyses in the present monograph, in the main, are polysystemic, multi-level, and ad-hoc; entailing frequent and unrestricted crossing over into the domains of history, culture, psychology, sociology and anthropology—an approach which frowns upon the segregation of academic disciplines and believes with Newman that knowledge is one and indivisible. I must confess that both linguistics and anthropology are fields that I entered by the back door. Having no professional competence in either of these subjects I was obliged to take the position of a lay student of socially motivated language behaviour. Additionally, the absence of satisfactory model, the exigencies of extensive fieldwork involving multiple hazards, and the complexities of theoretical orientations implicit in this kind of cross-disciplinary study imposed severe constraints on me in making my analysis exhaustive and complete. Much remains to be said and from many other points of view. The study will offer, I hope, some insights into how a secret lexicon and its patterning are related to a corresponding social organisation or disorganisation.

It is a very personal need for me to express my deep sense of gratitude to Professors William J. Samarin, Dell Hymes, and John Pride who offered encouragement as well as some very helpful suggestions and critical comments which illuminated my path and saved me from a number of pitfalls.

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My greatest debt, however, is to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, an august and congenial home for scholars, which offered me a Visiting Fellowship but for which this monograph would not have been written. Professor S. C. Dube, Director of the Institute, deserves my very special thanks for extending ungrudging help and for never allowing me the luxury of losing heart.

15 February 1977
Varanasi

R R Mehrotra

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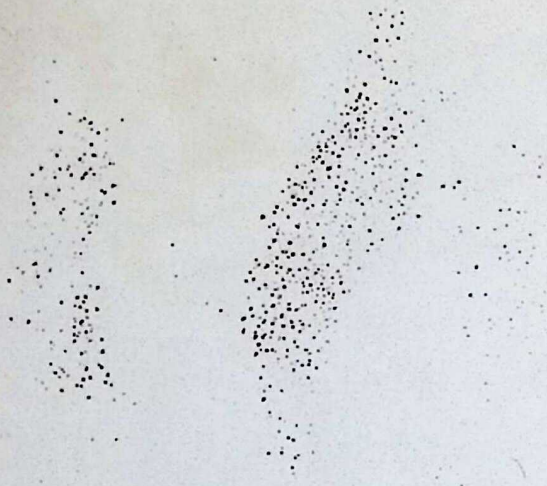

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# 1

# Communication Matrix of Criminal Subcultures*

My purpose in this study[1] is to discuss some dimensions of communication matrix of criminal subcultures,[2] popularly known as the underworld in a jointly linguistic and sociological frame of reference. One of the major lacunae in the sociolinguistic studies during the last two decades has been the neglect of group or community centred studies as compared to other areas of investigation. Whitley (1966 : 142) rightly laments that "far greater attention has been lavished on concept than on context or social group". This is particularly true of the small closed groups of the criminal world which impinge on our mind as unexplored "linguistic islands". They have failed so far to attract the disciplined attention of linguists with a sociological bias.

The few studies that we have in this area are unsatisfactory on various grounds. They are often concerned with just providing the glossary or lexicon of various criminal groups without saying anything as to the basis of their use. Sleeman (1836), Bailey (1908) and Kennedy (1908) are illustrative of attempts of this kind. In other cases (as in Mallik 1971) the investigators have contented themselves with collecting data from prisons and police stations rather than hazarding face to face encounter with criminals and watching them in various processes of interaction. Ervin-Tripp has perhaps such studies in mind when she complains "speakers are selected out of context and we may not know whether their speech varies with setting or receiver. We

*First presented at the Workshop on Social Stratification and Language Behaviour held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, May 1973.

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might expect, for instance, that criminals might use different speech to judges, parole officers, patrolmen and cell-mates" (Ervin-Tripp 1968; 206). She gets ample support for her statements from Sutherland's (1937) study of the professional thief.

The indifferent attitude of linguists towards criminal subcultures is not without reasons. Maurer's (1955 : 12) explanation for this phenomena of "scholarly avoidance" is: "The underworld areas have not been traditionally considered respectable for academic research" (*Maurer, 1955, p. 12*). This seems to have special relevance for the Indian situation. A University teacher and researcher having an aura of "respectability" about him will have a hard time explaning his conduct when found talking to pimps and prostitutes in the red light area or entering the dens of hippies and homosexuals even for purely academic purposes. Moreover, studying criminals in operation may sometimes involve great physical risk. Besides subjecting himself to "jeers", "insulting remarks" and "obnoxious comments", the investigator has to risk his life while collecting data. One investigator collecting data on prostitutes of Bombay is reported to have been assaulted with an open knife by a well-built Pathan (Punekar 1962 : 213). In another case an investigator was beaten mercilessly by *pandas* of Banaras for publishing something not palatable to them.

Yet another discouraging factor in this area is the existence of a wall of secrecy built by professional criminals around them and guarded with utmost care.[3] The task of the investigator is made all the more difficult by subtle and allusive kinesthetic and paralinguistic features employed in their channel of communication. It therefore requires a special kind of tact, abundant patience and courage, and skill for persuasion to establish rapport with criminal groups and win their confidence.

There is one more handicap. Although the sociology of language at the beginning of the seventies has come to be recognised as "an intellectual revolution" (Kjolseth 1972: 8), we do not as yet have a well-formulated theoretical framework and descriptive model for a systematic study of the underworld lingo. Naturally therefore linguistic researchers find it easier and safer to move

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in the "respectable" domains of the dominant culture rather than grope their way into the dark and dingy underworld.

Professional crime is pre-eminently a social artefact as has often been recognised by Durkheim, Sutherland and other criminologists. The starting point in a group-centered study as that of the underworld is usually the social group and not the code which is to be examined afterward within it (Hymes 1967a: 18). "A crucial characteristic", Hymes reiterates, "of socio-linguistic approach is that it looks in toward language, as it were, from its social matrix." (Hymes 1867b: 640). The social matrix and behaviour patterns of criminal subcultures have been examined in detail by the outstanding authority on American argot, David Maurer in a number of valuable studies though they are wanting in linguistic perspective and empirical support. Each specialized group of criminals according to Maurer, has a strong internal structure and operates by its own principles and norms of behaviour which may differ from group to group in accordance with his professional need and speciality.

Criminal subcultures express their social affiliation and group solidarity through argot. The word *argot* has undergone many sea-changes as is evident from a cursory look at the history of the term.[4] Some eminent linguists even today take liberty with the term and define it in a rather clumsy and awkward manner. Gumperz (1961 : 982), for instance, defines argot as "any speech variety distinct from that used around the home and the local peer group which serves as the norm in one or more socially definable communication situation." Gumperz here deprives the term of its restricted meaning. Any language other than the vernacular is deemed as argot. "Speech distribution within a single speech community in India may be studied in terms of vernaculars or of argots" (Gumperz 1961 : 985). He even goes to the extent of assigning English in India the status of an argot. "In most Indian urban communities English is the argot associated with the process of westernization" (Gumperz 1961 : 983). The flaws in Gumperz's definition are too obvious to be commented upon. The speech varieties which Gumperz defines here as argot have more appropriately been included in the cover-term "marginal language" by Jacobson.

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Argot, for our purposes, may be defined as "specialized language used by organized, professional groups operating outside the law; these groups normally constitute criminal subcultures, and the language is usually secret or semi-secret" (Maurer 1955 : 4). Argot is thus a "functionally specialized" artificial idiom invented for the purpose of expressing those aspects of behaviour which are deviant and often legally proscribed. One important distinction between argot and other caste and occupation dialects is that the speaker of an argot is conscious of it whereas those speaking other kinds of social dialects are not usually conscious of the distinctness of their speech.

The appearance of an argot in a particular subculture is closely linked with the social set-up, ethical norms and attitude of the public towards a particular act in a given period of time. Much depends on people's labelling an act as *deviant* : "deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label" (Becker 1963: 9). It is possible that an act which is proscribed today as illegal and criminal was given sometime in the past legal sanction and social acceptability. It is when an action becomes proscribed and declared illegal that an argot pertaining to that action finds scope for its birth and growth. This can well be illustrated by the case of gambling in India. Gambling in our time is a crime and forbidden by law. Naturally, therefore, gamblers have invented a good many argot usages whereas standard dictionaries have room for only a very few words pertaining to gambling. The situation was just the reverse in the remote past, say, the Vedic period when gambling was not considered disreputable, but enjoyed, on the other hand, the royal patronage. They used to have in those days a royal officer called *Aksavapa*, the superintendent of gambling. Even during the *Smriti* period gambling continued to be legal and in fact a good source of revenue to the state. *Smriti* writers like Kautilya and Yajnavalkya not only "lay down rules for the conduct of gambling" but also "speak elaborately about the place of gambling, the keeper of the gambling house, settlement of disputes among gamblers, the share to be paid to the king and so on". There was thus little need and scope for the development of an argot in the domain of gambling. On the contrary, numerous words pertaining to gambling, many of them formed and compounded by the great grammarian Panini,[5] forced their entry into the Sanskrit language.

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Patkar (1963 : 140-7) in a well-documented article gives a list of no fewer than 132 Sanskrit words pertaining to gambling which were in vogue at that time. We may thus conclude that the appearance or disappearance of an argot is considerably influenced by people's labelling an act as deviant or non-deviant. "Deviance", to quote Erikson (1964 : 11) "is not a property *inherent* in certain forms of behaviour. It is a property conferred upon those forms by the audiences which directly or indirectly witness them".

Perhaps the most essential quality of an argot in the context of criminal subcultures is its secret nature. The bond of secrecy is said to be stronger than many other bonds of the individual—civic, religious and occupational (Simmel, 1961). Secrecy of communication however is not confined to the underworld alone. It is also desired by several non-criminal groups in a variety of domains and for a variety of purposes. Thus, children evolve a language of concealment for mere fun and play; priests use secret religious vocables not to be understood by the common folk; doctors employ secret mode of communication to discuss among themselves the seriousness of a case without the patient being aware of it; lovers invent an ephemeral language of their own to make amatory propositions;[6] 'shopkeepers and brokers devise elaborate secret codes to communicate among themselves (Jesperson 1946 : 194-8). History of India abounds in cases of secret transmission of messages and information.[7]

But the concealment desired by non-criminal groups is different from the secrecy of an argot. An argot is invariably directed towards some kind of illegal or semi-illegal activity, often of parasitic nature. Goffman (1959 : 141-2), while discussing the problem of "information control" mentions three types of secrets—*dark secrets, strategic secrets* and *inside secrets*. The argot, though not fully covered by any of these types, comes very close to "inside secrets", the possession of which gives one the sense of belonging to an exclusive group and makes him feel separate and different from these outside his group. In other words, they give "objective intellectual content to subjectively felt social distance" (Goffman 1959 : 42).

Most criminal groups employ a kind of bi-dialectal verbal strategy, using at least two distinct speech varieties in two distinct sets of situations. In their ordinary pursuits of life and

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general conversation with the "out-group" friends, neighbours and members of their family, they speak the local dialect like anyone else in that region. They are cautious not to let any argot usage creep into their conversation. But as soon as they enter the sphere of crime, they discard the common language and switch over to argot usage which both facilitates the commission of crime and prevents its detection by public and police. If they continue speaking the ordinary language while planning and committing a crime within the hearing of the public, they are sure to be doomed. Thus if a shop-lifter on visiting a shop calls upon his associates in the ordinary language to run away with a particular article displayed in the shop, the consequence is anybody's guess. Naturally, therefore, he feels impelled to take recourse to some kind of language disguise which enables him to say things within the hearing of others without betraying himself. Some domains of the underworld as those of pimps, prostitutes, thugs and kidnappers demand in their interaction process heavy frequency of code-switching between the argot and non-argot speech varieties as they have to address simultaneously their associates as well as their victims. In other cases as those of thieves and pickpockets, this frequency is reduced to the minimum as they are not required to have any kind of dialogue with their victims unless, of course, they are apprehended by public or police.

There is yet another kind of argot taxonomy which strikes to a careful observer of crimical subcultures and their communication matrix. From the standpoint of secrecy or language disguise, argot usages fall into three distinct categories. In the first category the whole utterance is completely and perceptibly concealed from the public including the victim. By way of illustration, note the following extract from the in-group conversation of an otherwise Hindi speaking *Panda* of Banaras *salāy bari kā balangā balauale āv* "Bring pan worth ten paise" which no Hindi speaker can follow with any stretch of imagination.

The other category of argot consists of mixed utterances in which the structure words are drawn from the ordinary language of the dominant culture but the lexical items are deviant and unintelligible to the uninitiated. Thus when a thug says *khoddā bykhuri kar rahā hē, khoddā* (old man) and *bykhuri* (spying) are

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neologisms while *kar rahā hē* (is doing) are usual forms understood by all Hindi speakers.

The third category includes utterances which appear to be a part of the ordinary language but in fact have double meaning, one for the understanding of the out-group people, the other for the exclusive knowledge of in-group confiderates. Let us take an example from girl-trafficking in India. When girls trapped for prostitution are sent from Mirzapur, a well-known carpet manufacturing centre in Uttar Pradesh, to Bombay, a telegram is sent in advance to the head of the gang in Bombay asking him to receive three or four "carpets" being sent by a particular train on a given date. The Bombay man receives the "carpets" accordingly and disposes them of in due course. Likewise, when police are found patrolling near the place where criminals are in operation, the information is immediately conveyed to them in these words, *Bhainsi ko lāl patti bāndh do* (Tie a red ribbon to the buffalow)—red ribbon obviously referring to the uniform of the police. Yet another interesting illustration is provided by Sleeman. When a murderous thug wanted to ask one of his associates to prepare the grave for the victims standing in front of him, he would say, *Jāo katori manj lo* (Go, clean the bowl). The resemblance between the visual image of *katori* (bowl) and that of grave speaks of the ingenuity of the inventor of this argot. One great advantage of this type of argot is that secret messages can be exchanged between professional criminals even in the presence of the victims without the latters being least aware of it. On the other hand, in the argot usages of the first two categories the victim is conscious of the fact that some kind of secret communication is in progress even though he is not able to understand it. This obviously goes against the interest of the criminal. For, as Goffman (1959: 179) says, "secrets can be kept in this way, but not the fact that secrets are being kept".

Besides secrecy, argot usages have other functions as well. They give expression to the interests and values, associations and discriminations which are crucially important to the professional criminal. In other words, argot serves as "the vehicle of the content of the subculture" (Maurer 1955: 51). It arranges and classifies activities and experiences peculiar to it and also provides its speakers with necessary tools for discussing professional

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techniques. Furthermore, by providing clues for group identification as a guide to their behaviour in a given situation, argot has proved of immense help to the criminal. Thus, when a thug greets a stranger as *Aule Khan, salām* and is responded reciprocally, he takes him to be an in-group member. Equally illuminating is the case of strangers from Ephrains who disclosed their identity by pronouncing the Hebrew word *Shibbolet* as *sibboles* which cost them their heads (Judges 1930: 6).

A new sociological approach to the phenomena of deviance (Becker 1954: 2) lays stress on the study of the deviant in relation to the non-deviant in the process of interaction. This marks a clean departure from the conventional approach which concentrated only on the deviant. Argot can play a significant role in this direction by serving as what Gumperz calls "group boundary maintaining mechanism" (Gumperz 1971: 121). It can help a criminal group build a kind of "substitute society" and obtain recognition and status in it. Mays (1967 : 91) rightly describes this "substitute society" as "anti-society" which is not only deviant but also "defiant"; in a sense "at war" with the law-abiding members of the dominant culture. The hostile and disparaging attitude of the underworld towards the dominant culture is clearly revealed in the argot terms which are used to denote members of the dominant culture. Thus, in the domain of *thug* a *soldier* is called *naghu* (gun, a weevil); a barber is *khalkhosia* (one who peels off the skin); one who seizes a thug is *dhokur* (dog); one who is the the enemy of thugs is *bilha* (leper) (Sleeman 1836). In the prison-language the head-warden is called the *big noise, the ball of fire,* the guards are *screws,* the doctor is an *iodine* and the barber is known as *chinpolisher* or *butcher* (Mencken 1963). In the underworld of West Bengal, the Calcutta police is called *cigarette,* Bengal police *biri* and a Sikh is scornfully called *bandha gobhi* (cabbage) (Mallik 1971). Such disparaging expressions reflecting "a condemnation of the condemners" (Sykes and Matza 1957) lead one to a kind of linguistic determinism which Tegner (1880: 638) express in these words, "Who should feel obliged to show respect and obedience for persons and laws against which the language itself derisively sneers ?"[8]

The above list of pejorative expressions provides a sharp contrast to euphemistic terms which members of criminal subcultures use to describe their own group and its activities

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as is evident from the taxonomic outline given in table 1.1 :

TABLE 1.1 TAXONOMIC OUTLINE OF PEJORATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF CRIMINAL SUBCULTURES

| *Domain* | *Term in Ordinary Language* | *Term in Argot* |
|---|---|---|
| *Thug* | chief thug | Parker 51, *barkā* |
| | grave | *katori* (bowl) |
| *Panda* | Chief *Panda* | *dil* (well-built) |
| | Brahmin | *shwetā* (the white) |
| | *bhāng* (hemp) | *siddhi* (acquisition of supernatural powers) |
| | *gānjā* | *panditji* (the scholar) |
| | drinking wine | *tirath karnā* (to go on pilgrimage) |
| *Pickpocket* | chief among pickpockets | *rājā bābu* |
| | wine | bed tea |
| | *gānjā* | *Bhola Nath* |
| | prison | bighouse, college |
| | coffin | *kimeno* |
| | a short sentence | sleeping time |
| *Prisoner* | illicit liquor | Chou En Lie |
| | *gānjā* | Dalai Lama |
| | smuggled letter | kite |
| | Solitary confinement | cooler |
| | a notorious character | *Rustam* |
| | death by hanging | *rākhi bandhan* |
| | machine gun | typewriter |
| *Prostitute* | prostitute | *kulin*, lady, thoroughbred |
| | brothel | *sporting house* |
| | brothel keeper | land lady |
| | prostitute whose concern is stealing money from the customer rather than delivering any sexual services | rip-off-artist |
| | pimp | he-madam, friend, sugar, boss, player |
| | musician | *ustad*, professor |
| | venereal disease | Cupid's itch |
| | a tongue bath by a girl | a trip around the world |
| *Homosexual* | anus | *dukān* (shop) |
| | bi-sexual | A.C.D.C. |
| | buttocks | buns |
| | a young man | chicken |
| | urine | golden shower |
| | masturbation | hand job |

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These euphemistic expressions go a long way in minimizing the negative associations of an indecent thought or an illegal activity. Monteleone (1949 : 5) confirms: "Any gangster with a proper respect for his calling would deeply resent being called a murderer, but if referred to as a 'torpedo' or a 'dropper', his chest would sweel". This may appropriately be referred to as one of the techniques of "neutralization" which Sykes and Matza (1957) have elaborated in their magnificent study.

We shall now examine some of the esoteric linguistic devices of semantic specialization in criminal subcultures. An argot, it is generally believed, is patterned on the dominant language from which it draws its sustenance. Its reliance on the dominant language, particularly for its grammatical pattern is so great, and its speakers come from such a heterogeneous social environment that Vendrays (1951 : 251) doubts the very existence of "a sharply-defined criminal language". He suggests that an argot should be studied only by contrast to the common language, or to put it differently, in terms of deviations. Such deviations are often arbitrary. Nevertheless some general pattern can be discovered in their use as is evident from the brief tentative analysis that follows :

### Phonetic Deviation

Although some like Gumperz (1961 : 985) do not see much relevance in the phonetic analysis of argot, yet its usefulness cannot be denied since phonetic deviations and distortions which Conklin (1956 : 136) calls "speech disguise" are crucial to the communication matrix of professional criminals. Some of the deviations are as follows :

1. *Changing the initial sound* as in *bindu*—for Hindu, *jhandir* for *mandir* (temple), *jhanda* for *Panda*.
2. *Metathesis or transposition of sounds.* This is of two kinds: (*i*) complete reversal of the phonetic shape as in *net* for ten, *tep* for pet and *esclop* for police; and (*ii*) partial reversal of the phonetic shape as in *natha* for *thanā* (police station), *kuchā* for *chāku* (knife), *kabrā* for *bakrā* (goat), *tiph* for *pith* (back).

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3. *Insertion.* This can be of three types: (*i*) insertion of a single sound as in *goming mout tomdaym* for going out today ; (*ii*) insertion of a syllable as in *Khadaś* for *daś* (ten) or *skamul* for *skul* (school) which is very common among a tribe of thieves in Punjab (Bailey, 1902:16); and (*iii*) insertion of a word or phrase as in *turf arfaj arfaya* for *tu aj āyā* (you came today).

## Lexical Deviation

Argot owes its distinct character to its special vocabulary and to special meanings attributed to common words. Very often the vocabulary is marked by what Finestone (1964:283) calls "shocking earthiness and fancifulness". Lexical deviation can take place in a number of ways. Some are mentioned here by way of illustration:

1. *Neologism:* The underworld tendency of "self absorption", hatred for tradition and lack of interest in social intercourse leads its members to create new words and phrases. Such formations are both deliberate as well as accidental, and so their sources are not easily traceable and meanings not easily decipherable. The following words from Sleeman (1836) are examples of neologism: *bharkā* (rupees), *bhartote* (strangler), *bisni* (pickpocket), *chīhā* (a thug who shows sympathy), *chamman* (a Brahmin), *chik* (gold coin), *garthā* (dead body of a victim), *kabulā* (a menial servant of thugs), *karthi karnā* (consulting secretly about the murder of travellers), *kotak* (a novice in *thugi*), *kiswārā* (a well), *ladohar karnā* (to murder), *Ramesi* (the peculiar dialect of the thugs), *sonokā* (the first murder committed during the expedition), *shamsiā* (the person who holds the hands and feet of the person while the *bhartote* strangles him), *til* (a person found dodging the thug).

   Often the criminal groups invent their own sets of secret number words which do not have any resemblance with those of the dominant culture.[10] Such coinages are in fact a source of "delirious delight" to criminal subcultures.
2. *Special Meaning Given to Common Words:* Sometimes common words of the dominant language are adopted in argot and given special meaning and colour. This "extra dictionary"

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connotation known only to the in-group members proves a useful device for maintaining secrecy without giving cause for suspicion to members of the dominant culture. In the eve-teasers' argot, for instance, a girl is variously referred to as *māl* (commodity), *māmlā* (matter issue), *bullet*, *bulbul* and *mig*, each of which has an "extentional meaning" laid down in the dictionary. *Mig* 17 in argot expression tells the age of the girl as well. Among other examples of common words with uncommon meanings we can cite *bhasmi* for "flour", *nareal* (coconut) for "head", *ghorā* (horse) for "pistol", *dānā* (fodder, grain) for "cartridges"; and a most recent one *kalo-dragon* for "bomb" which came into use during the recent Naxalite trouble in West Bengal (Mukerjee 1970:34).

3. *Use of Personal Names:* Sometimes personal names with special meaning given to them are used in argot to give a slip to the uninitiated. Thus in the domain of thug, *Ganga Ram* signifies "danger ahead". In the underworld of West Bengal *Roshan Lal* signifies "a homicide", *Rustam* signifies a notorious bad character, and *Pyare Lal* stands for one who earns a living by making his wife act as a prostitute.
4. *Naming the Quality to Denote the Object:* Sometimes an object is mentioned just by referring to its quality as when *safedee* is made to signify "silver", *Kālā* is made to mean "opium", *dhuānsi*, "dry tobacco", and *five-by-five* is made to signify "a fat girl".
5. *Using Words for their Musical Value and Rhythm:* Examples of such use are: *nag dumadum* meaning "shirt", *chukchuk* meaning "girl", *phisphis* standing for "police" and *dhaldhal* standing for a "women's underwear" (Malik 1971:122). Jesperson's list includes *Isabella* for "umbrella", *honey* for "money" and *elephant's trunk* for "drunk" (Jesperson 1946:199). In England we have *twist and twirl* for "girls', *bang and biff* for "syphlis", and *flees and ants* for "pant"' (Maurer 1946:473-9). Franklyn's study (1960) is of special interest in this context.
6. *Using Non-verbal Means of Communication:* Gestures and other non-verbal means of communication have also been popular with most criminal groups. Jean Paul Sartre in his famous work *The Age of Reason* gives a vivid description of gestures

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used by drug addicts, prostitutes and sexual perverts for purposes of identification and communication (Sartre 1948). Furthermore, *khokhi* and *thoki* have also been effective non-verbal devices for secret communication. When, for instance, a thug leader wanted his associates to get ready with the tasks assigned to each one of them at the time of operation, he would give a *khokhi* which means "hawking aloud or casting up the phelgm preparatory to spitting". But if he smelt some danger and wanted the operation to be suspended, he would give a *thoki* (which means spitting out the phelgm).

Although most argot usages die a natural death with the passage of time, yet many survive, sometimes in disguise, in the speeches of other criminal groups if the group which fathered them is no longer in existence. The study of the secret language of *Pandas* of Banaras has brought to light a number of argot expressions in their speech which were once used by *Pangus*; the notorious river thugs plying between Patna and Allahabad more than hundred years ago (see Chapter 2). It is amazing how these argot usages get transferred from one generation to another and also from one criminal subculture to another to ensure their survival for centuries without written record to their credit.

Criminal subcultures can prove to be a fascinating area of research with promises of many new horizons to sociologically oriented linguists. They can give us valuable insights into how a way of life, a cluster of roles and patterns of behaviour are categorized through words and other non-verbal modes of communication. The underworld, by its very nature, is a peculiar world. It, therefore, requires a different kind of research strategy; a different set of tools to work with. It, for instance, looks frowningly at the arm-chair approach which is so popular in other areas of research. The primary aim of such studies, particularly at the hands of sociolinguists, should not be the exposure of the nefarious activities of the underworld, but a critical examination of how a deviant channel of communication influences and is influenced by deviant norms and deviant behaviour in various interaction relationships.

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## NOTES

1. I have followed in this study an inter-disciplinary, multi-method and multi-level approach. The illustrative material, by no means exhaustive, is drawn from my own field-notes and also from the work of others listed in the list References.

2. I find the concept of "criminal subculture" very useful for the study of small and compact criminal groups and their distinctive patterns of life. By "criminal subculture" we mean "a subculture that has become differentiated from the dominating culture, in so far as some of its beliefs, values and norms are of anti-social type (criminal or a social)" (Bondson 1968:87). For the subculture approach to delinquency Lerman's study is rather indispensable. He considers *deviant values, deviant words* and *deviant behaviour* as three constituent elements of a subculture and experimentally proves that of the three variables the *deviant words* or argot items reveal "the greatest potential for discerning tendencies towards delinquent specialization" (Lerman 1967: 210, 216-17).

David Maurer who claims to have used the term "criminal subculture" for the first time calls it a more descriptive phrase than "underwork" which sounds "romantic" (Maurer 1931 : 19). I shall, however, use both the expressions as synonymous in this study.

3. Amir Ali, the arch-thug and *phansigar* of the 19th century, who is said to have robbed and strangled 700 people, once confessed that at the age of 14 he, though fully conversant with Hindustani, could not follow any part of the conversation which his foster-father Feringhee had with his associates. During my first visit ot *Kashi Karwat,* a notorious temple of Banaras I failed to understand a single syllable of the prolonged conversation which the *Pandas* (temple priests) had among themselves, although in their out-group relations they were also speakers of Hindi like me.

4. For an historical account and various interpretations of the term "argot" see Mencken (1963: 703-6), Bondson (1968: 73), Lerman (1967: 210-12), Maurer (1955:4), Flexner (1969:162-3), Patridge (1933), Newman (1955;346-9), Jesperson (1946), Grierson (1922 Reprint 1968: 7) and Vendryes (1951:251).

5. cf. P. V. Kane, "Panini teaches the formation of many words relating to gambling" (Kane, III; 541).

6. Messages of love-making are exchanged among the tribals of Orissa by *pan* and betel. Thus, a leaf of *pan* with betel and sweet spices inside, accompanied by a fragrant flower, means "I love you". If too much spice is put inside the leaf and one corner turned in a particular way, it signifies "come". The leaf with marks of turmeric means, "I cannot come". A small piece of charcoal inside the leaf means "Go, I have done with you". (Lewin, 123).

7. Here is a classical example. At the end of the battle of Panipat in 1761 the Maratha Peshwa received the message thus, "Two pearls have been dissolved, twenty seven gold mohurs have been lost and of the silver and copper the total cannot be cast up." The two pearls in the message stand for two generals in command, Sadashiv Rao and Vishwash Rao.

8. cf. Cressey (1953) who believes that the process of criminalization is closely linked with acquisition of certain linguistic expressions for criminal

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activities. This in effect supports Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of the effect of language on thought.

9. For a detailed phonetic analysis of argot see Conklin (1956) and Mallik (1971).

10. See Chapter 4.

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# 2

# The Secret Parlance of Pandas

This is an exploratory attempt[1] at describing within a broad framework of the sociology of language, the special and secret parlance of the *Pandas* (Hindu priestly agents) of Varanasi, the majority of whom belong to what Goffman calls "semi-illegal fringes" (Goffman 1959:180) of our religious life. Let it be made clear at the outset that the study is by no means intended to be an *expose*, although many of the secret vocables and some of the murky methods of duping used by *Pandas* are for the very first time made to see the light of day here, having been rescued from what appeared to be an almost impregnable well-guarded secrecy. My purpose on the other hand is to examine the structure, patterning and distribution of this argot so as to understand the behaviour pattern and interactional strategy of its speakers and its underlying social meaning.

It is almost a truism that the present-day sociologists of language have refrained from studying the underworld and its subterranian lingo perhaps because these are supposed to lack "respectability" and involve risk of various kinds besides the wall of secrecy which surrounds them (Mehrotra: 1973). Maurer's observation also makes a pointed reference to this lacuna: "We have more data on the behaviour patterns of almost any obscure primitive tribe than we have on the problem areas within our own culture" (Maurer 1955:12). This is true of both linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. The Indian scene, for instance, can offer a ready laboratory for observation and study of the fascinating argot of various criminal and semi-criminal groups like the thieves and dacoits, burglars and smugglers, kidnappers and eve-teasers, hippies and homosexuals, pimps and prostitutes and

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even a large section of *dalals* (brokers) and *Pandas*. The present study of the argot of *Pandas* is a preliminary venture in this direction.

The approach in this study is largely the one repeatedly suggested by Hymes that "the natural unit for socio-linguistic description is not the language, but the speech community" (Pride 1972:18). The notion of speech community, according to him, "postulates the basis of description as a social rather than a linguistic entity. That is one does not start with the code and look forward to its context. One starts with a social group and looks within it at the modest present" (Hymes 1967:18). This is roughly the procedure followed in this study. A brief account of the socio-cultural make-up of the community of *Pandas* will, therefore, precede the analysis of their argot so as to be able to understand the basis for its use and distribution or, in other words, to answer questions: "who speaks it to whom, when, in what setting, about what topics and with what social consequences". It is in the answer to such questions that one discovers the "raw data of descriptive sociology of language" (Fishman 1971: 220).

I have used Varanasi (also called Banaras) as a background for the study of the argot of *Pandas*. I have done this mainly because I am best acquainted with the *Pandas* of the city. Being a native of this place I have been living since birth in their midst, although not being a *Panda* myself. The study with a few modifications would, however, apply to *Pandas* in other centres of Hindu pilgrimage in north India, i.e. Mathura, Allahabad, Vindhyachal, and Gaya which I visited to collect comparative data in course of field-trips.[2]

Visiting holy places is believed to be an act of great religious merit and Varanasi being one of the seven most celebrated places of Hindu pilgrimage (Walker 1968: 118) draws pilgrims all the year round from all parts of India. "The Jerusalem of the Hindus" (Cape 1909), "the Athens of the East", "the holiest of the holy cities" (Sen 1912), "the most sacred spot on earth" (Walker 1968) are some of the phrases which highlight the great religious significance of Varanasi as a pre-eminent centre of Hindu pilgrimage. According to a Sanskrit text one who dies in Kashi (Varanasi) is sure to get salvation (*Kasyam mararān muktih*). According to another text one who fails to get redemption

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elsewhere can get it in Varanasi (*yesāmkwapi gatirnāsti tesām Varanasi gatih*). It is believed that those who die here are at once taken to Shiva's paradise in spite of the crimes and sins they might have committed in their lifetime. The two important sacred centres in Varanasi are temples and *ghats* (flights of stone steps used as bathing places) which also happen to be the natural haunts of *Pandas* and scenes of their activities. There are about eighty *ghats* in Banaras, the sacredmost being *Manikarnika Ghat.* A bath at *Manikarnika Ghat* is supposed to wash away all the sins. This is also considered to be the holiest place for performing rituals of various kinds particularly *godan* or gifting of a cow to *Pandas,* which is considered as highly deserving of reward in the life hereafter. Even ashes and bones of dead persons when immersed in Ganga, particularly at *Manikarnika Ghat,* are capable of transporting to heaven the persons whose remains they are. Besides *ghats,* temples register heavy concentration of pilgrims. The number of temples in Varanasi, according to an official estimate, is over two thousand and that of the idols about half a million (*Gazetteers,* Varanasi, 1965: 90). The most important and far-famed temple is Vishwanath (Lord Shiva) Temple. Vishwanath is the presiding deity of the town. Temples and *ghats* are thus the principal haunts of both the pilgrims and the pilgrim hunters including *Pandas.* It is estimated that the number of pilgrims coming into and going out of Varanasi is as large as the permanent population of the city (Thomas 1960: 32).

## The Social Matrix of Pandas

*Pandas* are the priestly agents of Hindu ritualistic acts. They, like religious specialists elsewhere, are in possession of "ritual authority" and are recognised as "competent in the solution of religious needs" (Vallier 1968: 444). They have assumed various nomenclature in various religious centres of north India. *Pandas* of Gaya, for instance, are traditionally known as *Gayawals*; those of Prayag (Allahabad) as *Prayagwals*; of Mathura as *Chōbes* and of Varanasi as *Gangaputras* (sons of Ganga). One notices a certain hierarchical division among the *Pandas* based on ancestry, personal status, nature of work, and professional competence. There are four major categories of *Pandas* in Varanasi and the following are brief generalized descriptions of each of them.

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1. *Nōkul (nine families) Pandas*: They are at the top of the hierarchy. They have large clientele scattered in different parts of the country and a large number of assistants to help them in their priestly services. Initially there were nine families of *Pandas* of this type as is evident from the term *Nōkul* (nine families) but at present five of them are extinct. *Pandas* of this category are also known as *tirtha-purohit* (priest of the pilgrimage-centre). They are usually affluent and are supposed to provide facilities like accommodation, information and banking to pilgrims.
2. *Jātrāwāl:* These are usually employed by *tirtha-purohits* to accompany pilgrims as guides to take them to holy shrines and other places. Their number is estimated to be one thousand.
3. *Ghatiyās:* They are priests squatting on wooden platforms under huge palm leaf umbrellas and rendering various services to bathers. Their number is estimated to be about two hundred.
4. *Bhaddar or Bhandhar:* These numbering around five hundred are also called derisively *sarak chāp* (road-brand) *Pandas*. Their job is to wait at points where pilgrims enter the city, i.e., railway station, bus station, and other central places and fetch their potential victims. Sometimes they accompany them to temples and markets as well. *Bhaddars* generally call themselves "Joshi Brahmins", but the fact remains, as has also been noted by the 1909 *Gazetteer of District Banaras*, that many of them are not Brahmins and are drawn from various low castes.

A pilgrim is generally not aware of these distinctions and calls them all by the common term *Pandas*. With a view to maintaining a strong internal structure and safeguard their group interests these various groups of *Pandas* have separately formed their own associations : *Tirth-Purohit Sangh* (association of *tirth-purohits*), *Joshi Brahmin Sangh* (association of *Bhaddars*), *Bhagirathi Seva Sangh* (association of *ghatiyās)*. The hierarchy among the *Pandas* referred to above is noticeable in other centres of pilgrimage as well, although the types of *Pandas* constituting various levels in the hierarchy are not known by the same names as those in Varanasi. In Gaya, for instance, these groups are known as

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*Gayawal* (chief priest), *Acharya* (subordinate priest employed by *Gayawal* for conducting the *sraddha* ritual), *Rajgāriyā* (one who picks up pilgrims from the railway station and other entering points), and *Dhami* (non-Brahmin priest).

*Pandas* are in many senses denizens of the underworld, constituting a functional subgroup within it.[3] The following pronouncements from a cross-section of the press, members of public and various reports of government bodies leave no doubt as to the underworld role of *Pandas* in general and those of Banaras in particular:

"Gangaputras, sons of Ganges, have an evil reputation for roughury and rapacity"—*Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Part 6 (Reprint 1909: 179).

"The Gangaputras who act as guides and instructors to the ignorant pilgrim folk are more concerned in extracting money from the worshippers and in pestering tourists than in attending to their religious duties"—Havell (1933: 81).

"When you go to the ghat, Gangaputras pester and strangle you. And ghatiyas fleece you of your clothes and cheat you every now and then"[4]—Bhartendu Harish Chandra in *Prem Yogini* (Translation by the author).

"The pandas threaten the pilgrims and declare that divine displeasure will visit those who do not accede to their demands and unless they are paid whatever they ask for. In many cases the pilgrims are deprived of all their cash and belongings and left adrit.

"The extortions of the pandas most of whom are ignorant and rapacious are provervial"—*Report: Hindu Religious Endowments Commission* 1960-62, Ministry of Law, Government of India, 1962, p. 60; p. 167.

"Today priesthood means to practise goondaism and the result of goondaism is complete destruction)"—Vidyarthi (1961: 108).

"rapacious middleman between the devout and the deity.

"... these supposedly godly but actually greedy men ....

"The threatening and intimidating methods employed by the pandas make them something of presentday Pindaris"—Malhotra (1972: 8-17).

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"Pandas of today earn their living by goondagiri"—*Aaj* (a Hindi daily from Varanasi) (8 June 1973).

"Vishwanath lane, the favourite haunt of pandas (in Varanasi) may be described as a gas-chamber where a new-comer feels suffocated and wants to get out of it as soon as possible.

"A pilgrim is surrounded by pandas as if he were in the heart of a cactus forest"—*Aaj* (6 Feburary 1973).

"Pandas are disgrace of the town and headache for the administration. The bank of Ganga has become a centre of forgery, dupery and intrigue"—*Aaj* (5 February 1973).

In fact *Pandas*, with a few exceptions, have earned such a notoriety over the years that the few respectable and well-meaning among them do not like to be called "*Pandas*" and instead prefer the term "*tirth-purohit*" in its general sense. The very fact of the official move for compulsory registration of *Pandas* with the local police authorities in 1905, 1916 and again in 1972 is indicative of the semi-criminal role of *Pandas* and their alliance with the underworld. A *Panda* generally is a member of the criminal subculture in that "he usually has no other means of subsistence, he disdains employment in the dominant culture, he repeats his criminal act an infinite number of times with little risk of conviction and imprisonment, he learns his way of life from others in his own sub-culture, and he has status among other grifters based primarily on his income, his professional skills, and his reputation for living up to the code of his sub-culture" (Maurer 1972: 333-4).

*Pandas* are, however, different from other criminal groups in that they enjoy legal sanction and social patronage although their pernicious and parasitic activities are in no way different from those of the professional criminals. The naive faith which the devout Hindus attach in their priests; detailed prescriptions laid down in religious literature for various rituals to be performed in centres of pilgrimage at the fulfilment of vows, cure from serious diseases and death of progenitors together with the laxity of law in this respect provide protection and patronage to *Pandas* and allow them to operate with impunity.

*Pandas* generally live in a world of their own which is locked up inside its own conceptual reality. They are "socially inferior Brahmins" who are not allowed to eat together or inter-marry

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with "superior" Brahmins. They are mostly uneducated and have little social contact with the rest of the citizens. Temperamentally they are highly individualistic and often quarrelsome. They live intensely in the present and are fond of leading easy carefree life which is made possible by good income without much work and heavy consumption of narcotics like *bhang* and *ganja* (marijuana and hemp) which they associate with Shiva asceticism. They live parasitically and often very prosperously at the expense of the innocent pilgrims. What Maurer says in another context is equally applicable to the majority of *Pandas*: "They have no more feeling of guilt than does a fox who takes hens from a farmer" (Maurer 1955: 14). Their primary concern all the time is to fleece their victims of as much money as possible by various devices which will be discussed later in this chapter. When a pilgrim is deprived of all his money and some rituals are yet to be completed, they lend him money at exhorbitant rate of interest, sometimes exceeding even one hundred per cent. Furthermore, for whatever the pilgrim buys at the guidance and advice of his *Panda*, he pays unaware 50 to 70 per cent more than the actual price of the thing bought as a result of a secret deal between the *Panda* and the shopkeeper. Sometimes the pilgrims are surreptitiously sold out at fancy prices by one *Panda* to another without the victims being least aware of it. The sale of pilgrims is more common on the river banks where the *ghatiya* or the ghat priest sells them to *Jatrawal pandas* who will guide them to temples and bazars. In some cases the very names of *Pandas*—both real and assumed—may be suggestive of their character. Some examples are: *Khuni* (blood-thirsty) *Panda*: *kare* (hard, cruel) *Panda*, *kalki* (incarnation of vice) *Panda*, *Regul* (thief) *Panda*, *Terhu* (crooked) *Panda*, *Jhagaru* (contentious) *Panda* and *Makkhar* (biting-fly) *Panda*. A Shiva temple called *Kashi Karwat* in Varanasi has particularly been the centre of *Pandas'* iniquitious activities. For a considerable period it was believed that death at this place would immediately lead one to emancipation from the chances of rebirth. Some pilgrims are said to have availed of this easy means rather too literally by handing over all their belongings to local *Pandas* and getting themselves killed by a big saw which was provided in a large underground apartment for this purpose. When this came to the notice of the government, the district authorities closed the passage leading to the underground apartment

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with iron-gratings which were removed only once a week under police supervision for purposes of cleaning the place. The temple still continues to be a notorious den of parasitic *Pandas*.

That Varanasi has been a great centre of thugs since the 12th century is a historical fact (see Moti Chand 1962). Hemchandra, the great Sanskrit scholar has stated in *Kumarpal Charit* (3/59) : *"Varanasi thugānām sthānam"* (Varanasi is the abode of thugs). It is interesting to note that thuggery in the medieval time, as it is today, was closely associated with Hindu religion and various superstitious practices (Moti Chand 1962: 137). The close resemblance between the secret language of *Pandas* with that of *Pangoos,* the river thugs who operated in this region in the early part of the 19th century also establishes *Panda's* identity with the underworld.

*Pandas* in course of time have evolved a remarkably stable argot of their own to fit in with their circumstances and underworld activities. This argot, a necessary adjunct to their profession, conveys little or no meaning to those not "in on the know". It should, however, be pointed out that the secret parlance of *Pandas* in Varanasi does not have a special name assigned to it just as the name *Gayawali* has been given to the special language of *Gayawal Pandas* and *Ramasee* was the name given to the language of thugs (Sleeman 1836). Furthermore, the four hierarchical classes of *Pandas,* i.e. *Nōkul, Jātrāwāl, Ghatiyā,* and *Bhaddar,* have an equal right over the use of argot terms belonging to the profession unlike the religious practitioners in the spiritualist churches in which "the four ranks in leadership are characterized by the right to use certain argot terms, each rank using terms from those available to the lower one(s), but not vice versa" (Samarin 1975: 10).

A *Panda* usually finds himself at two levels of interaction :

1. with members of his own group
2. with members of the dominant culture, especially pilgrims. It is only at the first level of interaction that he uses argot, more so when interacting with fellow-*Pandas* in presence of pilgrims.

He thus combines in himself a dual role—a role which is both (overtly) sacred and (covertly) profane.[5] This dual role

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requires him to use multiple channels of communication. He speaks, besides the local variety of Hindi, two more languages, one being Sanskrit and the other, an artificial language of concealment which can be assumed or sloughed off as and when the situation demands. The former carries "overtones of dignity and prestige" (securing, at least externally, alliance for him with the nobility); the latter of "low valued type of behaviour", linking him with the underworld. There are two significant implications of this situation. Firstly, both Sanskrit and argot (in most cases) are formally distinguishable from the everyday language. Secondly and more importantly, both are equally unintelligible to the common herd, including the pilgrims.

Thus the repertoire (Gumperz 1964 and Grimshaw 1972) of most *Pandas* normally includes three languages which are confined to specific topics and "transactional types" in their daily round. The three codes are used to express distinct sets of behaviour, attitude and value in consonance with what Hughes (1972 : 296) calls "the linguistic division of labour".

## Sanskrit

*Pandas'* use of Sanskrit (mostly in the form of text from *Agama* or *Puja paddhati*) is confined to certain ritualistic acts, i.e., while the pilgrim is going to take a dip in Ganga or making offerings of water, milk, flowers, leaves, sandal-paste, etc., while conducting *Shraddha* (rites in honour of the dead progenitors) and *Godān* (gift of the cow; it is believed that the cow's tail will ferry them over the river of death) ceremonies on the bank of the river, and finally while receiving gifts in cash and kind from his clients and giving blessings in turn. In most cases, *Pandas* have committed to memory only a few Sanskrit verses to be uttered on specific occasions like the ones mentioned above even without understanding their meaning or caring for correct pronunciation. This observation also finds support from the *Report of the Hindu Religious Endowment Commission* (1960-62) : "Their pronunciation and accentuation of the mantras they recite is unimpressive and faulty and the deplorable fact is that they do not know the meaning or significance of what they utter".

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## Hindi

*Pandas* use Hindi in its local dialectal form while addressing pilgrims and other members of the public. Even when ritualistic performances are conducted in Sanskrit, various instructions to pilgrims are given in Hindi. Sometimes the Sanskrit verses of ritualistic performance are given arbitrary renderings in Hindi so as to impress upon the illiterate clients from rural areas. An extract from one such recitation in Hindi is: *Kashi, pāp nasi, barnā pāp harnā, dādā ke nām, dādi ke nām, pitā ke nām, mātā ke nām... pindā karāi, pānc brāhman ko bhojan dān, vastra-dān, sevā-dān sarvanimitta khuśi man se ikyāvan ruṗyā diyā; ho bābā Bholenath sākshi rahnā, manokāmnā ṗuran karnā"* (Kashi , the destroyer of sins, Varuna, the reliever from sins, in the name of grandfather, in the name of grandmother, in the name of father, in the name of mother...I give on my own accord Rs 51 as donation for conducting *pinda* and towards food and clothing, etc., of five Brahmins. O Lord Shiva, be witness to this and fulfil my desires). Since these utterances are meant to be repeated by pilgrims after the *Panda* conducting the ritual, these are marked by crude simplicity, pauses at short intervals so as to break an utterance into rhythmic units, and repetition of indentical sounds.

## Argot

Besides Sanskrit and Hindi, a *Panda* uses an artificial language of concealment peculiarly belonging to his group. This special lingo is addressed to *Pandas* of various categories and other "sacred specialists". *Pandas* normally switch over to argot in the following circumstances :

1. when they want to throw hints to their in-group associates or Head regarding the total number of pilgrims, the state they come from, their financial status and the purpose for which they are on pilgrimage;
2. when they are out to locate potential victims from among a group of passers-by in central places of the town;
3. when they have to discuss techniques and devices by which to secure maximum possible gifts and money from their clients;

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4. when they want to convey to their partners the percentage of their own share in the total income to be made in a given deal;
5. when they are required to prove or establish identity to their group [as soon as a *Panda* accompanying a group of pilgrims utters the words *jhandā rigal hō* to other *Pandas* not knowing him, his identity is established in no time; he is taken by them as one of their own class; this then serves as a mechanism for maintaining group boundary (Gumperz 1971: 121) or "as a union card so to speak" (Maurer 1972: 338)];
6. when they wish to negotiate a transaction for the sale of pilgrims among themselves;
7. when they desire either to spell out or to settle differences and disputes regarding claims over a group of pilgrims or over their share in the income made;
8. when they have to communicate their desire or extend invitation to take narcotics like *bhang* and *ganja.*

The three languages mentioned above are subjected to frequent code-switching which reflects, besides other things, "shifts in interpersonal relations" (Pride 1971 : 97). Argot terms are allowed to creep in whether a *Panda* is reciting Sanskrit verses or talking to the pilgrim in Hindi in course of a ritual act. Often while conducting a ritualistic act the *Pandas* also resort to what is called "cutting across different genres of discourse" (Samarin 1972 : 11) such as prayer, invocation and giving of instructions (to a pilgrim or an associate)—punctuated by a variety of verbal ejaculations at short intervals. An example of this kind of code-switching and genre-mixing highlighting "the mixed sociocultural identity" of *Pandas* is as follows:

*(To his associate: in argot ) marti jabri hō. khalag thilāv* (The client is rich; make him sit separate). *(Turning to client who is about to take bath: in Hindi) hān, hāth joriye* (yes, fold your hands), (in Sanskrit) *Ganga Gangeti you bruyāt yojanānām śataihrapi, mucyate serva papebhyo, vishnulokam sa gacchati, nahāiye* (take bath); *(addressing the associate: in argot) Khustā lipāye bade godā balaule āv* (Bring the record book so as to enter his name), *laudhio thōkay ke hō* (a cow is also to be arranged for godan).

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The urge to remain concealed appears to be both natural and necessary not only for *Pandas* under reference but also for priestly agents the world over. Priests in various other religions have also tended to use a language which has been both sacred and secret so as to mystify the audience. Witness Jesperson: "The common herd understands either not at all or only dimly, what is said, intoned or sung in the secret religious language of priests. ...But its very unintelligibility lends to the spoken words a kind of mystical glamour. And the priests know how to exploit the advantage they heve in being possessed of the language of the very God or Gods" (Jesperson 1946:194). Jesperson elaborates his point by citing illustrations from the language of church service in various European countries. In Denmark, for instance, the language of priests contains strange words—mostly neologisms—such as *miskundhead, forsage, forfordele, overanvorde* which are not understood by the majority of laymen. In Russia, likewise, a kind of old eccelesiastical Slavonic language is said to be used in the church service, of which only one phrase *boze moi* (my God) is known to the people as they are required to cross themselves whenever this phrase occurs in the utterance of the priest.[6] More recently Hughes (1972: 308), commenting on the wide-spread liturgical bilingualism, has made the same observation; "The priest performs his mysteries in obsolescent language; the laymen live, sin and are guilty in a vernacular".

The argot of *Pandas* is drawn from a diversity of sources. Some of their argot terms are of recent origin and some date back 100 years and even more. Some of them are the exclusive possession of the *Pandas* of Varanasi. Let us examine these points in some detail.

Perhaps the biggest source from which the *Panda's* argot in Varanasi has drawn its sustenance is the eommon stock of the dialectal form of Hindi known as *Kashika* spoken in and around Kashi (Varanasi). *Pandas* have no grammar of their own. The syntactical elements of their special language are largely patterned on *Kashika.* It is mainly in its lexical aspect that this argot is distinct from the language of the dominant culture. Even lexically, in many cases, the argot terms cannot be properly understood without reference to the corresponding items in the source languages, particularly the one belonging to the dominant culture.

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Maurer's formulation regarding the relationship of criminal subcultures with the dominant culture seems to have special relevance in this context. He visualizes the dominant culture as represented by a large circle with various subcultures forming very small circles about its rim. Thus "some of these small circles will be largely within the dominant culture; some encysted wholly within it, some only slightly within it, and others barely touching the periphery so that for all practical purposes they are outside it" (Maurer 1955: 10). The relative position of the small circles will signify the degree to which various subcultures are absorbed and accepted by the dominant culture. Thus the subcultures like those of Sypsies and Hippies can be said to be touching the dominant culture very slightly whereas the subculture of *Pandas* falls largely within its bounds.

The argot of *Pandas* is related to the dominant language in two ways. In the first instance, common words of ordinary speech are given uncommon meanings known only to the initiated. Table 2.1 lists users of this kind :

TABLE 2.1 The Argot of Pandas Drawn from the Common Words of Ordinary Speech

| *Lexical Item* | *Ordinary Meaning* | *Special Meaning in Panda's Argot* | (*Illustration Argot*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| *Majhī* | boatman | Client or a pilgrim | *majhī cōkar hō* (The client is rich) |
| *Jhandā* | flag, banner | *panda* | *jhandā lagal hō* (The *panda* is accompanying) |
| *rojgāri* | businessman | *panda* who brings pilgrims from railway station and other places | *rojgāriyā kaharo gayal*? (Where has the priest gone?) |
| *singhārā* | waternut | three | *singhārā sela* (charge three, i.e. three rupees) |
| *jhalkānā* | to show up faintly | to make one bathe | *hāli jhālkānā* (make him take bath quickly) |
| *bājā* | musical instrument | gun, pistol | *bājā li āva* (bring the gun) |

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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *murchal* | a flapper made of peacock-feathers | palm-leave umbrella | *murchal selāva* (make him pay for a new palm-leaf umbrella) |
| *dhālnā* | to mould or cast | to sell | *mājhī dhālnā* (Would you sell your clients?) |
| *safedi* | whitewash | silver | *safedi galihen* (The client would give silver) |
| *mārh* | a dead body floating on the river | a client difficult to manage | *mājhī mārh hō* (The client is difficult to manage) |
| *sambhal* | pimp | one hundred | *mājhī sambhal selale hō* (The client has paid one hundred) |
| *godā* | new branch (of a tree) | record-book (*khātā*) | *godā lipā liye* (Enter his name in the record-book) |
| *dānā ghās* | gram and grass | *bhang* (marijuana) | *dānāghās kuch hoi?* (Shall we take marijuana?) |
| *Panditji* | scholar | *ganja* (hemp) | *Panditji se bhent karba?* (would you like to smoke ganja?) |
| *tīrāth karnā* | to go on pilgrimage | to take alcohol | *Tīrath kare calba?* (Would you like to come for an alcoholic drink?) |
| *kala* | water-tap | Kashi Karwat (a temple) | *Kala par le ja* (Take him to Kashi Karwat) |
| *cirāgī* | lamp | part of the income deposited with the chief *panda* to meet the emergency expenses of any member of the group | *Cirāgī de aile* (Have you made your contribution to the common fund?) |

In all the examples listed in Table 2.1 special, extradictionary, "intentional" meanings and personal touches are given to nouns, verbs and adjectives of day-to-day language, namely Hindi in the present context. Such items invariably have two meanings; one for the pilgrim and other members of the dominant culture; another and a secret one for the in-group associates. Thus when a *Panda,* within the hearing of his clients, says to another *Panda, mājhi se singhārā le la,* the client will take the utterance in its ordinary sense, "Take waternuts from the boatman"; but for the

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in-group *Panda* it means "Charge three rupees from this pilgrim". Or when a *Panda* in presence of an outsider asks another *Panda, panditji se bhent kare jaiba?* the outsider will take its surface meaning, "Will you go to meet Panditji (Scholar)" ?, but to his associate it is an enquiry whether he would like to smoke *ganja.* This appears to be a common practice with most criminal groups. Thus when a police officer goes to a locality haunted by criminals, the news of his arrival is thus passed on by an in-group member to the rest of his associates, *Bhaiya, Bhensi ko lal patti bandh dena* (Brother, tie a red ribbon to the buffalow); *lal patti* (red ribbon) obviously referring to the red turban worn by police. Such expressions which appear harmless and innocuous to a layman do not normally create any suspicion in the mind of listeners. A *Panda,* in this way, is able to communicate with his associates about topics requiring concealment and at the same time maintain a good face of himself and his profession. The following observations of Maurer are significantly applicable to the subculture of *Pandas:* "As a subculture becomes more aware of its functional identity, a self-image is generated which must be bolstered by word and deed, and the argot becomes a prime factor in trigging criminal behaviour" (Maurer 1972: 339). This device of "semantic specialization" can give us some useful insight into the mechanism and diplomacy of face-saving practices which have been so admirably dealt with by Goffman (1973) recently.

It should, however, be borne in mind that practically all argot terms in Table 2.1 are drawn from the immediate environment in which a *Panda* lives and moves so that they do not stir up attention and come in the way of his maintaining "a front of sincere solicitude" before his clients. Thus the words *mājhi, jhandā, singhārā, murchal, mārh, panditji,* and *tirath karnā* are all part of the ecology of the sacred complex of Varanasi, particularly the river bank. The local setting, therefore, leaves its stamp and colour on the secret code of *pandas.*

There is yet another category consisting of words which, although borrowed from the majority language, are made unrecognizable by artificial mutilations of their phonological components. It is needless to point out that the *pandas'* parlance is exclusively a spoken mode and hence these phonological mutilations are of vital significance in making it incomprehensive

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to the uninitiated. Table 2.2 illustrates some of the common devices of this type:

TABLE 2.2 MUTATIONS OF COMMON WORDS IN THE ARCOT OF PANDAS

| *Word in the Majority Language* | *Word in Panda's Argot* |
|---|---|
| **CHANGING THE INITIAL SOUND** | |
| *a rhāi* (two-and-a-half) | *Kharhāi* |
| *savā* (one-and-a-quarter) | *bavā* |
| *ardha* (half) | *khardhā* |
| *mandir* (temple) | *jhandir* |
| *pandā* (priest) | *jhandā* |
| *kapārā* (cloth) | *liparā* |
| *gahakī* (customer) | *dahakī* |
| *purānē* (old) | *ghurānā* |
| *alag* (separately) | *khalag* |
| *lagal* (accompanying) | *rīgal* |
| *samajhanā* (understand) | *ramajhnā* |
| **TRANSPOSITION OR CONSONANTAL INTRCHANGE**[8] | |
| *Pindā* (Oblation to manes) | *dāpī* |
| *lathēt* (one with lathe) | *thalēt* |
| *larkā* (boy) | *kalarā* |
| *dhelā* (a half-pice coin) | *ledhā* |
| *panhucanā* (to reach) | *canhupanā* |
| *ghar* (house, hospice) | *ragha* |
| **ADDING PREFIXES** | |
| *pacīs* (twenty-five) | *lapacīs* |
| *Dhi* (cow) | *lōdhi* |
| **ADDING SUFFIXES** | |
| *Fūl* (flower) | *Fulkā* |
| *barā* (big, chief) | *barāru* |
| **SHORTENING OF VOWEL** | |
| *ākāśi* (toddy) | *akāsī* |
| *bāhri* (outer) | *bahri* |
| **DROPPING OF SYLLABLES** | |
| *adhelī* (adhela, a half-pice coin) | *dheli* |
| *grihastha* (householder) | *girhī* |

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It should be noted here that the examples given in Table 2.2 are merely illustrative rather than exhaustive. The difficulty involved in the coining of new words seems to be partly responsible for the mutilation of existing words (as in the examples in Table 2.2) so as to make them look differently, Vendryes was fully aware of this difficulty when he referred to the alternative practice within easy reach of all such groups, "When we have no more opportunities of drawing at our discretion upon neighbouring vocabularies for new words, we can always modify existing words upon some regular principle" (Vendryes 1951: 255).

Often *panda's* argot reveals his fondness for alliteration which lends it vigour and picturesqueness. By "alliteration" in the present context we mean, "the repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of two or more words immediately succeeding each other or at short intervals" (Collitz 1932: 204). The following utterances are illustrative:

*lahkā lagāy ke lārhe sela* (Charge money after applying sandalwood paste)
*salāy bari kā balangā balaule āv* (Bring pan worth ten paise)
*bāvaj vaste belaha* (charge money for food)
*lagghi lagal hō* (A *Panda* is already accompanying)
*hāli jhalkāy ke jhandir lejā* (take them to the temple after making them bathe quickly)
*khobarā khubar gayal* (The pilgrim with ashes has left the place)
*khōrvāy ke khubar gayal* (He left the place after a shave)
*lipara lahāvā* (Make him pay for clothes)
*thalēt ke thān thiāly da* (Make him sit with the *Ghātiya*)
*mājhi mārh hō* (The client is difficult to manage)
*jhilkā jhanjh hō* (The client who has to do penance is a pauper)
*āva, piyal-pāval jāy* (Come, let's have a drink/smoke)

Such "prosodically pleasing" utterances provide evidence to Samarin's formulation that "in religion greater liberty is taken to satisfy the aesthetic appreciation for the substance of language" (Samarin 1972: 12).

The argot of Banarasi *Pandas* has also borrowed a lot from various criminal subcultures. The most striking in this context is the borrowing from the vocabulary of thugs, particularly river-thugs called *Bangoos* who operated in boats all along the bank

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of Ganga, between Patna and Allahabad, in the early decades of the 19th century. The resemblance will be clear when we compare (Table 2.3) the argot terms of *Pandas* under reference with the secret vocabulary of thugs compiled by Sleeman more than a hundred years ago (Sleeman, 1836).

TABLE 2.3 COMMON TERMS IN THE ARGOT OF PANDAS AND THUGS

| *Term* | *Meaning in Panda's Argot* | *Meaning in Thug's Argot* |
|---|---|---|
| *kajā* | man | man |
| *liparā* | cloth | cloth |
| *safedi* | silver | silver |
| *khāl khosiā* | barber | barber |
| *sutli* | 20 rupees | 20 rupees |
| *thamōni* | bribe | bribe |
| *bhasmi* | flour | flour |
| *dhunās* | dry tobacco | dry tobacco |
| *thigānā/thibānā* | to make one sit | to make one sit |
| *borki* | knife | knife |
| *borkiānā* | to stab with knife | to stab with knife |
| *lagghi* | Subordinate *panda* who brings pilgrims to the chief | one who traps victims and brings them to the scene of operation |
| *bhartote* | a *panda* at Kashi Karwat | a strangler |
| *belha* | to charge money | thugs who gives signals for strangling |
| *jawar* | two | a pair of jars for carrying Ganges water |
| *adhākur* | 50 | 50 |
| *singhārā/singhore* | three | three persons killed in a thugee operation |
| *orhānā* | to beat | to strangle |

This close resemblance between the secret language of *Pandas* and that of thugs confirms the *thugee* role of *Pandas* under reference.[9] A perusal of the list in Table 2.3 will reveal that in many cases the original meanings of *thugee* words have been retained when borrowed in *Pandas'* argot. There are, however, a few cases in which the terms borrowed from *Ramasee* have been

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given different meanings which suit the profession of *Pandas*. *Orhānā* in the language of thugs means "to strangle" but in *Pandas*' argot it means "to beat". *Lakra* for thugs was a man with no property; for *Pandas* it means just "boy". Sometimes a *thugee* word reappears in *Pandas*' speech in new guise by changing its part of speech. The term *belha*, for instance, is noun in the argot of thugs but is used only as a verb in *Pandas*' argot with necessary modification in meaning befitting their role. It is indeed amazing how these vocables which were in vogue about a century and a half ago are still surviving in the speech of *Pandas*.

Furthermore, there are a few terms in *Pandas*' argot which can be traced back to a still earlier source, namely, the language of vagrant, migratory gypsy criminal tribes. One such term is *kajā* which in *Pandas*' argot and in the argot of *sasi* tribe, mostly found in Panjab, means "man" (Grierson 1968: 11).

It is equally interesting to note that on the one hand the argot of Banarasi *Pandas* shows striking resemblance with the argot of the thugs who flourished more than a hundred years ago; on the other hand they do not show any similarity with the argot of the contemporary *Pandas* of Gaya, another important centre of Hindu pilgrimage in North India. Thus the two contemporary groups in Hindi speaking region pursuing the same profession but operating at a distance of more than a hundred miles are found to have evolved different and mutually unintelligible sets of secret vocables for identical objects and purposes. The geographical factor, it appears, at least in the present case, is a more potent factor in bringing about language distance or "conditioning the rate of language change" (Bhatt 1968: 18-20) than the factor of time, the social level and function of the two groups remaining the same. The situation is analogous to the different argot terms for the same objects and purposes, evolved by thugs operating from far-flung places like Jabalpur, Indore, Sagar and Banaras in Sleeman's time (Sleeman 1836). The above comparison of the argot of Banarasi *Pandas* with that of the 19th century thugs comes into still sharper focus when studied in the light of the following comparison of the argot of Banarasi *pandas* with *Gayawali*, the secret language of Gaya *Pandas*. The distinction in the argot expressions of the two groups is caused more prominently by geographical rather than social or temporal factors, although one should not go too far in examining these variables independent

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of one another. The comparison of *Gayawali* with the argot of Banarasi *Pandas* is as given in Table 2.4.

TABLE 2.4 COMPARISON OF THE ARGOT USED BY PANDAS IN BANARAS AND GAYA

| *Term in the majority language (Hindi)* | *Corresponding Term in the Argot of Pandas at Banaras* | *Corresponding Term in the Argot of Pandas at Gaya* |
|---|---|---|
| *yajmān* (client) | *mājhī* | *larhōr* |
| *panda* | *jhandā* | *ek sirāh* |
| *nirdhan* (poor) | *jhanjh* | *dhāmi* |
| *dhani* (rich) | *cōkar* | *dakhinār* |
| *bahi* (record book) | *godā* | *masik* |
| *bachiyā* (calf) | *laudhi* | *dhānicargurawā* |
| *pindā* (oblation to manes) | *dāpi* | *murhī* |
| *kaparā* (cloth) | *liparā* | *ukari* |
| *dūdh* (milk) | *goras* | *pulendā* |
| *puruś* (man) | *kajā* | *musnēt* |
| *strī* | *kūbi* | *musnētin* |
| *larkā* (boy) | *kalarā* | *kanakā* |
| *larkī* (girl) | *kalarī* | *kanakī* |
| *candan* (sandalwoodpaste) | *lahakā* | *khōri* |
| *bhojan* (food) | *bāval* | *jakanī* |
| *bhāng* (marijuana) | *maspatti* | *hariyarī* |
| *panda* who fetches pilgrims | *rojgāri* | *adhkat* |

Besides borrowings, quite a few terms in the secret language of Banarasi *Pandas* are of unknown origin and hence largely undecipherable. Many of those might be termed neologisms or what Ervin-Tripp calls "new morphophonemic realizations for lexical categories" (Ervin-Tripp 1971: 73) which appears to be a common phenomena of the speech of small cohesive groups. Argot items of this type are listed in Table 2.5.

The origin of the terms in Table 2.5 is so obscure as to make any speculation about them uncertain and often futile. If coinages, it is not clear whether they have been coined deliberately or by some happy accidents. They nevertheless bring colour and liveliness to their speech and bear testimony to the fertility of their imagination and adventure in words, a characteristic in common with the argot of most criminal subcultures.

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TABLE 2.5 ARGOT TERMS OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN AMONG *Pandas* OF VARANASI

| *Term* | *Meaning* |
|---|---|
| *horahā* | a pilgrim with ashes of a dead relative |
| *jhilkā* | a pilgrim who has to do penance for the killing of a cow or some such heinous sin. |
| *khostā* | *panda* |
| *khusta* | name |
| *baranga* | *pan* (betel leaf) |
| *kirri* | *godān* (gift of a cow) |
| *thāl* | *ghat* |
| *lekh* | wine |
| *ghunghalā* | a palm-leaf umbrella |
| *bavaj* | food |
| *cimādā* | servants (generally well-built and armed with *lathi*) employed by chief-*pandas* to act as their body-guards |
| *khohar* | bones and ashes to be immersed in Ganga |
| *khartī* | *ganja* (hemp) |
| *bheng* | rupee |
| *ragul* | thief |
| *khotar* | a policeman |

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that *Pandas*' argot, like most other argots of the underworld for that matter, is "largely a matter of vocabulary" (Maurer 1931: 100) which gives it its distinct character. This special vocabulary, however, has a limited range restricted to the specific topics, processes, functions and types of interaction which require secrecy. Another limitation of this argot is that it is essentially a male's language since women are not admitted to this profession. The argot is further restricted to items in only four lexical form classes: noun, verb, adjective and adverb. The largest number of argot terms belong to the first category, i.e., noun; the examples being *jhandā, jhandir, lārhe* (money), *lōdhi, goda, ghunghalā, tuli* (cigarette), *lekh, khotar* and *ragul*. The list of argot verbs is equally large and includes terms as *martānā, selnā, thilānā, rigānā, khōrwānā, rigānā* and *khubarnā*. An important trait of the argot verbs listed is that, although none of them belongs to the majority language, yet

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formally they are all patterned on the dominant language as is evident from their ending *nā*. Among the argot adjectives, popular with *Pandas*, mention may be made of *jhanjh, ledhā, ghurānā*, and *chōkar*—the last one having made its entry into the dominant language. There are very few adverbs in *Pandas*' argot. My field-diary includes only two: *Navo* for "not" as in *navo selas* and *Khalag* for "separately" as in *khalag pujava.*

Pilgrims often come to Varanasi, with a view to getting salvation either for themselves or for their progenitors. Banaras is perhaps the only place in the world where many go to die; for death in this holy place, it is believed, will give a sure passport to paradise. People dying elsewhere are also brought here for cremation at *Manikarnika Ghat*, which also happens to be the most important bathing centre. It is but natural, therefore, that the argot of Banarasi *Pandas* has many words having direct or indirect association with death. A *Panda* whose duty is to extract maximum possible money from the pilgrims is significantly called *martakār* (one who kills). A pilgrim on the other hand is called *marti* (presumably, one destined to die). A client who is difficult to handle is called *marh* (a corpse). It may be recalled that corpses of men, women and animals floating in Ganga are a common sight in Banaras. Furthermore, the task of fleecing the pilgrims of his money is called *martānā* (to kill). A pilgrim who has already been fleeced is known as *maral mājhi* (a client already dead). A man accompanying the dead body for cremation has been given the term *dagiyā*, while the pilgrim who has brought bones or ashes of his relative for immersion is called *khobār.*

The term *marh* referred to above is a good example of what Gumperz and others have called "foregrounding" which occurs when "a word is used in other than normal contexts; and cultural associations and values represented by it become[6] "highlighted" (Gumperz 1964: 328). Thus when a *Panda* referring to a particular client says, *mājhi marh hō* (the pilgrim is a corpse), he is pointing at the insensitivity, "resistance to persuasion" and lazy movement, of the pilgrim in question; the qualities usually attributed to a dead body (*marh*) floating on the river in Banaras.

The argot of Banarasi *Pandas* is highly elaborate as regards subtle classification of various types of *Pandas* and pilgrims in accordance with their status, character and role. The typology of pilgrims in this argot is given in Table 2.6.

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TABLE 2.6 ARGOT TYPOLOGY OF PILGRIMS

| *Term* | *Used for (Type of Pilgrim)* |
|---|---|
| *Cōkar* | rich (client) |
| *Ledhā* or *Jhanjh* | poor (client) |
| *marh* or *thas* | a client who is difficult to handle; one who pays money after a good deal of haggling. |
| *majhi* or *girhī* | pilgrim (average, ordinary) |
| *Swetā* | a Brahmin pilgrim |
| *benhā* | a pilgrim who is afflicted by some supernatural power like a ghost or a witch |
| *dagiyā* | a pilgrim who has just cremated a dead body and come for a purificatory bath |
| *Khobār* | a pilgrim who has brought ashes or bones of his relative to be immersed in Ganga |
| *Jhilkā* | a pilgrim who has to do penance by *godān* (a gift of a cow) for some sin he has committed |
| *Jantū* | a pilgrim who is dressed in the western style (from "gentleman") |

These finer distinctions are professionally significant for *Pandas* and they figure quite often in their in-group conversation. Similar distinctions have been made about *pandas* themselves as will be evident from Table 2.7.

TABLE 2.7 ARGOT TYPOLOGY OF PANDAS

| *Term* | *Used for (Type of Panda)* |
|---|---|
| *Jhandā* | *pandā* (average, ordinary) |
| *dīl* | chief *panda* |
| *rojgāri* or *laggi* | a *panda* whose job is to fetch clients from railway station and other central places and bring them to *dīl*. |
| *bhartotā* or *martakal* | a *panda* who is assigned the task of extracting maximum possible gifts and money from the pilgrims |
| *khostā* | a *panda* who guides the pilgrims to temple and shopping centres |
| *thalāt* | *ghātiyā* or *ghat-purohit* who is incharge of a *ghāt* and provides bathing facilities to pilgrims |
| *cimādā* | junior *pandas* (not necessarily Brahmin) accompanying *dīl* as his body-guard and helping him in various other ways. They are normally on the pay-roll of chief *panda*. |

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Often when a term of argot becomes known to other groups or even to *Pandas* of other places, it tends to be abandoned and substituted by other argot terms. This phenomenon partly explains the existence of more than one argot term for the same object or activity which is of vital concern to the *Pandas*. The multiplicity of argot terms in the case of items in Table 2.8 is illustrative.

TABLE 2.8 MULTIPLICITY OF ARGOT TERMS FOR THE SAME ITEMS

| *Item* | *Argot Terms* |
|---|---|
| rupee | *larhe, raiyā, bajnā, bheng, barī* |
| fifty paisa coin | *dhelī, talī, kumba* |
| to charge (money) | *selnā, martānā, belhnā* |
| pilgrim | *mājhi, girhī* |
| *pinda* (oblation to manes) | *dāpi, hattā* |
| palm-leaf umbrella | *ghunghalā, murchal* |
| marijuana | *dānā-ghās, maspattī, siddhī* |
| to take wine | *tirath karnā* (to go on pilgrimage), *lekh likhnā* (to write an article) |
| charging for food | *bāvaj vaste martānā, tani par martānā* |

Sometimes *Pandas* merely mention the quality of a material to stand for the material itself. Take for example *safedi* (whiteness) which in the argot of Banarasi *Pandas* means "silver". Here the white colour of silver is made to denote silver itself. In the like manner *dil* which actually means size or physique is used to signify chief priest.

A significant feature of the argot under reference is that the objects and activities which are associated with *Pandas* are described in it in highly eulogistic terms while those associated with the dominant culture are generally given perjorative expressions. This clearly reflects their attitude of exaggerated appreciation towards in-group members and a corresponding attitude of contempt and hostility towards those outside their fold. A list of items having to do with the *Pandas*' own life and activity is given in Table 2.9 together with laudatory equivalents in the argot.

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TABLE 2.9 LIST OF WORDS CONNECTED WITH PANDA'S LIFE AND HIS ACTIVITIES

| *Item* | *Argot Term* |
|---|---|
| Chief *panda* | *dīl* (one who has a robust physique) |
| A Brahmin pilgrim | *Svetā* (one who is white) |
| gun | *bājā* (musical instrument) |
| *tarī* (fermented juice of tree) | *akāsi* (that which drops from the sky) |
| marijuauna | *siddhī* (fulfilment) |
| cigarette | *tūlī* (a brush for painting) |
| *gānjā* | *Panditji* (scholar) |
| to take alcohol | *tirath karnā* (to go on pilgrimage) |
| a *panda* who traps pilgrims | *rojgārī* (businessman) |

Some of these terms provide a befitting illustration of what Sykes and Matza have called "techniques of neutralization" by which justification is provided to deviant behaviour, and the individual is free to engage in delinquency without serious damage to his "self-image" (Sykes and Matza 1957: 667). Thus when a *Panda* whose job is to trap pilgrims is called *rojgārī* (businessman); or when marijauna is called *siddhī* (salvation), it is a case of neutralising technique which Sykes and Matza have described as "the denial of injury". This is equal to vandalism being defined as *mischief* and theft being viewed as *borrowing*.

Sometimes argot expressions are epigramatic and are used as "short-cuts" in speech. Mostly instructions regarding the technique to be employed for fleecing the pilgrims are conveyed through such argot phrases. *Phulkā pujāo* and *khurāra martāo* are illustrative phrases of this kind referring to special techniques of duping the innocent pilgrims. When a junior *Panda* is conducting a ritualistic act for a group of pilgrims he receives instruction from *Dīl*, the chief *Panda*, in the form of one of these phrases. In the case of *phulkā pujāo*, the *Panda* at the end of a ritualistic act will pick up one of the pilgrims in the group, take him to a deity close by, mutter a few words in Sanskrit and put some flowers into his hand. He also manages surreptitiously to conceal eleven or fifty one or hundred and one rupees 'as the case may be' in the midst of flowers unnoticed by the pilgrim. Then that pilgrim is brought

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to his group and in presence of all, the *Panda* will receive those flowers from which he will ostentatiously pick out the currency notes and bless the pilgrim for this gift. The pilgrim who held the flowers is simply amazed but he is unable to say anything since the money hidden in the flowers has been given after chanting of *mantras* (incantation) and hence he finds himself at a point of no return. Thereafter the *Panda* will take other pilgrims of the group one by one to that deity and make them pay eleven or fifty one or hundred and one rupees (the amount supposedly paid by the first pilgrim) impressing upon them that a norm has already been established by one of their own group and anything less than that would not be acceptable. Last of all he will return to the first client and charge the amount which he, without the borrower's knowledge and asking, lent out to him at the end of the ritualistic performance.

Another technique known as *khurārā martānā* is equally interesting. When a *Panda* is busy conducting a ritualistic act, he is approached by an in-group associate who, again very ostentatiously, hands over Rs. 51 to him saying that the pilgrim who was here a short while ago has paid this amount by way of *dakahina* (remuneration). This is deliberately done to give a sort of hint to the pilgrims currently engaged in the ritual as to what they would also be expected to pay at the end of the ritualistic act.

The message which is so effectively conveyed by a two word phrase *khurārā martāo* or *phulkā pujāo* in the argot will require lengthy explanation running into several sentences if communicated in the majority language. Brevity, in most cases, appears to be an essential characteristic of argot expressions. It would be appropriate to recall in this context the oft quoted passage by Edward Sapir, "Generally speaking, the smaller the circle and the more complex the understanding already arrived at within it, the more economical can the act of communication afford to become. A single word passed between members of an intimate group, inspite of its apparent vagueness and ambiguity, may constitute a far more precise communication than volumes of carefully prepared correspondence interchanged between two governments" (Sapir 1931).

The *Pandas*' argot is essentially a mixed language. Functional words (pronouns, prepositions, conjuctions and the like) are all drawn from the majority language while most nouns, adjectives,

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and verbs are special argot terms. The word-order in argot sentences is the same as in the dominant language. Ervin-Tripp's diagnosis confirms this in no ambiguous terms; "the structural morphemes are not as sensitive to the forces of cohesion as are other morphemes" (Ervin-Tripp 1971:74). The following sentences culled from *Pandas*' speech on various occasions are illustrative:

| | |
|---|---|
| *raghā me le jā* | (Take him home) |
| *ũ hamār ghurānā hō* | (He is my old client) |
| *siddhi banāy la* | (Prepare marijuana) |
| *dāpi ka samān li āva* | (Bring materials for pinda) |
| *lāhakā lagāy ke larhe sela* | (Charge money after applying sandal wood paste) |
| *bāvaj ke vaste bhi belaha* | (Charge for food also) |
| *khalag pujāva* | (Make him perform the ritual separately) |
| *khustā likha leh la?* | (Have you got the entries made in the record book?) |
| *marti nāhin selat hō* | (The client is not paying money) |
| *bavā raiyā selale hauyan* | (He has paid a rupee and a quarter) |
| *marti khāy ke khubar gayal* | (The client left after making the payment) |
| *salāy bari kā barangā balole ava* | (Bring along 'pan' worth ten paise) |

This kind of intermixture was also a common feature of the thugee language in which the verbs of the accepted language were mixed with their private code word to give their language "the colour of a known and accepted one" (Mookerjee 1970:34).

There are, however, a few utterances which can be said to be unmixed formations. Practically all the items in sentences of this kind are drawn from the special argot without any perceptible trace of the dominant language.

| | |
|---|---|
| *ghungalā martānā* | *kharārā martānā* |
| *lōdhi thokāva* | *navo selas* |

An obvious lacuna in utterances of this kind is the fact that the listeners cannot help getting the impression that things are being

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kept secret from them. To put it differently in Goffman's words, "Secrets can be kept in this way but not the fact that secrets are being kept" (Goffman 1959: 179).

Samarin after going through the first draft of this study raised a very pertinent question. "But what is the maximum length of an utternace in this argot? If there are no more-than sentence texts then this may be one place where one can write sentence grammars". (Samarin, personal communication). Although the argot of *Pandas* abounds in sentence-length texts, yet this is not the maximum length of an utterance as can be seen from the longer stretches of utterance cited earlier in this study. A more-than-sentence-length text constituting a free discourse in intra-group situation is a mixed kind of thing containing elements of both the argot and the local dialect of Hindi. There is, however, one exception, the case of nearly a dozen *Pandas* associated with the temple called *Kashi Karwat,* whom I once heard talking among themselves in unmixed argot without any perceptible trace of the local speech for about half an hour. I must confess my efforts to collect the samples of more-than-sentence-length argot texts in connected speech did not meet with much success as they were adamant and cautious not to let it go out of their fold. Nevertheless, this establishes the fact that a *Panda* "speech" of more-than-sentence-length utterance does exist. May be sometime in future one will succeed in collecting longer stretches of discourse which might give us "something of real theoretical value" as Samarin rightly believes.

The *Pandas'* argot is both a product and a precondition of the specialised occupation of a closed group which borders close upon the underworld. It is the argot role (Sykes 1956: 86; Manning 1970: 244) of *Pandas* together with the overall argot setting which ultimately determine which channels of communication are open and which are closed. The present study which, in fact, is a preliminary statement makes no pretensions to completeness either in regard to the linguistic or social data. Nor does it claim to have used sophisticated technical tools in the analysis of the argot material. What it, however, claims to have done is to have brought for the first time the secret language of *Pandas* and its sociocultural matrix to the notice of scholars with a view to showing something of the relationship between their secret speech ways and the dynamics of their social organisation and mental

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make-up. If it be argued that the vocabulary of concealment in possession of *Pandas* is too meagre to allow them much freedom and scope in communication, it can be said that the subjects in which they require secrecy are very limited and it is indeed surprising how with a little stock of secret vocables and a few manipulations of the majority language they manage to awe and mystify the uninitiated and maintain their group exclusiveness. As regards relevance of a study of this kind in a subject area which is yet to emerge as a field in the sociology of language, I can do no better than repeat the words of Roman Jacobson, which sum up my position as well:

"... granting that this paper does in itself represent the speech of only a small subpart of the community,. it is still of use in indicating directions for further research in this area: in providing a basis for comparison, a taking-off point for further studies, a means of discovering what is universal in the data, what is not and why" (Roman Jacobson 1972: 47).

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to Professor William J. Samarin of the University of Toronto for some very valuable critical comments on the first draft of this paper. His paper "Religious Ends and Language Resources" which is to appear in W. J. Samarin (ed.) *Language in Religious Experience* (1975) is a perceptive and penetrating study of the ways language is used in religious practices and is of special interest to scholars researching in this area.

2. My experience of working in the midst of *pandas* for learning their secret language and with its help their underworld activities has been very exciting and illuminating. The fieldwork for this study was done in Banaras between December 1971 and March 1972 and again in Banaras, Mathura, Gaya, and Allahabad between September 1972 and March 1973. The first problem that I faced and tackled was to gain communicative competence in the argot so as to be able to observe without influencing what was observed. And this has perhaps been the crux of the problem in all sociolinguistic fieldwork which Labov has posed in the following words, "How to tell whether the light is on or off when the refrigerator door is closed" (Labov 1964).

In Banaras I had the privilege of having *Pandas* as my old acquaintances and neighbours as I have been living since birth in my ancestral home just above *Manikarnika Ghat*, the sacredmost bathing centre. Bathing in the river every morning and also in the evening during summer was part of my daily routine. This gave me ample opportunity of observing the life-style and activities of *pandas* in a variety of situations. This also helped me in ascertaining at the time of intensive fieldwork the representative nature of my informants which would

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not have been possible otherwise. The *ghatiya* patronised by me and my family and a *nōkul panda* living in my neighbourhood (who would remain anonymous) not only disclosed their secret language to me, all in good faith, but also assured their circle of acquaintances that my interests are purely academic. In some cases I had to pay money to the needy and greedy *pandas* to let me know their argot expressions. At Gaya I had the privilege through a local influential man to stay for a couple of days with a leading *Gayawal panda* and he was kind enough to permit me to accompany his agents and assistants to various places like *Phalgu* and *Vishnupad* and watch things for myself. At Mathura, as soon as I entered the *Holi Darwaja* I was surrounded by a host of local *Pandas* called *Chōbes* who took me to be one of their prospective victims. I heard someone repeat the local saying *jal me kachhue, thal me chōbe* (while in Mathura, beware of tortoise in water, and of *Chōbe* in hand). As I did not have any acquaintances there, I introduced myself as a free-lance journalist (which in fact I was years ago) collecting material on centres of pilgrimage with special reference to *Pandas* and their grievances. In course of prolonged conversation with them and their chief, I was able to win their confidence and learn something of their argot. At Allahabad the trip did not meet with much success since *pandas* there were all panicky as a result of an article about them which appeared in a popular Hindi Weekly from Bombay a short while ago. A leading *Prayagwal panda* refused to talk to me on the ground that since the publication of that article in the Bombay weekly in which he was shown as a very affluent person with a big army of servants and a fleet of vehicles, the Income-Tax authorities had beenpestering him everynowand then. Hehad, therefore, issued instructions to all his friends and associates not to answer any queries from any investigator. At another place I was even threatened of dire consequences if I did not leave the place immediately. My instinct for self-preservation led me to instant and complete obedience. These are some of the "joys and trials" which I experienced during my field trips for the present study, which, one may notice, are so very difficult and different from the fieldwork in other (non-secret) communities and groups lying almost like an open book before a researcher.

My approach in the present study has been a multi-method approach. After a rapport was established with *panda*(s) I tried to elicit argot terms for things related to their life-style and occupation which I had listed beforehand on the basis of my observation of their environment. For the sake of validity I used the same list while recording responses from a cross-section of *pandas*. After having acquainted myself with this secret lexicon, I watched them talk in their argot and examined its use in a variety of interactional contexts. Often I had to pose myself as an outstation pilgrim with different *pandas* on different occasions as my guide, allowing myself to be fleeced of my money so as to satisfy myself with the accuracy of the argot I had learnt and its functional allocation. In cases where I did not follow an argot expression, I took it down and got it explained to me by my informants whose confidence I enjoyed in full. The methods for generating data and analytical procedure referred to above may appear wanting in systems and sophistication, they nevertheless served my purpose in full.

In course of the fieldwork I collected several sets of secret number names

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which have not been included in the present study as I have examined them in a separate chapter included in this volume.

3. Samarin is somewhat sceptical about the charactisation of the *pandas* as people of the underworld because of the legal sanctions of their activities and also because of the fact that they actually render a service. I am still inclined to think that the role of the *pandas* with a few exceptions in the *Nōkul* category, is very similar to that of professional cheats whom Samarin rightly describes "con" men. The "legal sanction" which I have alluded to in the text and on which Samarin bases his opinion, is given only to what they are supposed to do as religious guides and priestly agents and not to what they actually do in these roles. The "service" which they render no doubt makes them different from thieves and burglars but such a service in most cases is aimed at fleecing the innocent pilgrim of his money and other belongings by employing a number of duping devices. Nevertheless, the rather "romantic" term "underworld" may have been abandoned in favour of a more appropriate descriptive term "criminal subculture" which may cover varying degrees of deviations from the dominant culture. I am thankful to Professor Samarin for having raised this issue.

4. *Ghat jao to Gangaputtar noce de gal phansi, kare gatiyā bastar-mocan, de de ke sab jhānsi.*

5.cf. "It would be a mistake to think that language serves religious ends without being influenced by or venturing into the profane world" (Samarin 1975:10).

6. The foregoing observations of Jesperson have been criticised by Samarin as being "very distorted, anti-clerical, almost bigoted" (personal communication) but one thing is, however, certain. Every word of Jesperson in the above statement applies to the *pandas* under reference.

7. cf. Marijuana is called "grass" also in the narcotic underworld of New York, Washington and San Diego. For details see Cannoy and Masterson (1952:26).

8. Transposition of syllables has been a favourite device of the concealment language of law-breakers in other countires as well. Thus in the secret speech of Spanish underworld *Pecho* become *Chepo* and *Vistar* becomes *Tisvar*. The professional criminals of Holland say *nelefar* for *rafelen* and *ragnive* for *vinger*. Likewise, in the concealment language of London consters *ten* becomes *net*, *fifteen* becomes *net-evif*, *woman* becomes *namow* and *police*, *esclon* (Jesperson 1946:199).

9. Some of the common *thugee* words are the common currency among the criminals generally. An example is *nareal* which in both has the same fixed meaning "The head" (Mookerjee 1970:31).

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# 3

## Dalali Boli : Milieu and Function

The purpose of this study is to examine the formal features and functional characteristics of the slang of *dalals* of Banaras silk goods, with particular reference to their swindling role in the context of buying and selling. *Dalal* is a kind of broker or middleman who procures customers, usually outstation visitors, from hotels, *dharamshalas* (hospices), and city centres and takes them to the retail shopkeeper with whom he has entered into a private contract regarding a certain percentage of his own profit to be added on the items sold to the customers brought by him. The customer who knows nothing about this private arrangement is made to pay this percentage over and above the price which the shopkeeper desires to take for his goods. The rate of this concealed commission is not fixed but varies from customer to customer in accordance with his status, depth of his pocket, the nature and quantity of the articles to be bought, and finally the degree of the customer's innocence. Taking a quick assessment of all these factors the *dalal* announces the percentage of his commission on the spur of the moment in a very guarded language to prevent the customer from getting the slightest hint of this agreement.

The *dalals* mentioned above belong to the retail market of Banaras silk goods. There is another category of *dalals* who are concerned with the buying and selling of silk goods in the wholesale market particularly at the time of *satti*.[1] They too serve as middlemen, this time between the manufacturers and *kothidars* (owners of business chambers) who act as commission agents for wholesale customers. *Dalals* of this category buy the silk saris, etc. from the manufacturers and sell them to *kothidar* after adding

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their own profit on it, which again varies according to the situation in hand,—the quality of the item, the intensity of demand, and the type of customer. The dialogue that takes place between the *dalal* and *kothidar* in the process of bargaining is usually in a secret code not known to the outstation customers sitting in their midst. The purpose of resorting to a secret mode of communication in this context is to hide the discussion from the customer who if told what was being discussed would feel hesitant in buying that item.

The *dalals* of both the categories speak besides the majority language a restricted language which is both secret and slangy and is often known as *dalali boli*, i.e. the dialect of *dalas*.

The institution of *dalali* is pretty old and considerably widespread. According to a study published more than a hundred years ago the *dalals* in the large and commercial cities of India are said to be in action "from time immemorial" (Dass 1860: 27). There are evidences in Hindi literature which prove the existence of this institution in India as early as the 16th century.[2] Originally the institution of *dalali* was a healthy one intented to help both the buyer and the seller. The *dalals* helped a buyer in guiding him to a reliable shop where the items of his choice could be bought at a reasonable price. As the *dalals* were conversant with the existing market rate as also the inferior/superior quality of the products they saw to it that their clients were not cheated. Often they made use of their bargaining skill for the benefit of their clients. They were helpful to the sellers in the sense that they brought them the customers who otherwise wouild not have reached them. In course of time the role of *dalals* became parasitic and swindling.

Often the *dalals* stand and wait at the entrance of the market place and as soon as a prospective buyer is spotted by them, they follow him to whichever shop he goes on his own, without the latter's consent or knowledge. On reaching the shop the *dalal* secretly communicates, either through words or gestures, to the shopkeeper the percentage of his own commission to be added to the price, which is collected later. Sometime this rate is as high as 25 per cent which indirectly encourages the shopkeeper to have a further increase in his own profit in the given deal. And the customer, their victim, is absolutely unmindful of this swindling drama. The *dalals* have organised themselves into a professional

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body and consider it to be their legitimate right to meddle between two parties.

It may be pointed out that the desire to conceal certain things from the customer is not confined to the Indian market alone. Iona and Opie report the case of greengrocers and butchers in England who resort to a kind of back slang "to ensure that the customer shall not understand what is being said". To give an example, "Give her some old serag end" will thus be conveyed by saying each word back-ward, "Evig reh emos delo garces dene" (Iona and Opie 1960: 320).

The *Dalali Boli* as spoken in the silk market of Banaras is not entirely an independent and self-sufficient dialect but a kind of language mix relying heavily on the colloquial form of Hindi spoken locally. The grammatical pattern is drawn almost entirely from the majority language as it is considered to be "more resistant to change" (Gumperz 1968: 117). What makes it different from the day-to-day speech is mostly its special lexicon which includes both coinages as well as old familiar words given new unfamiliar look by manipulations of various kinds. The following extract from the tape-recorded material covering coversation between a *dalal* and a *kothidar* in the buying and selling situation will unmistakably reveal its reliance on the local form of Hindi. Words peculiarly belonging to *Dalali Boli* and not existing n day-to-day language have been given their Hindi equivalents in brackets and each of the utterances is followed by an English translation.

KOTHIDAR: *ka ho Kallu! Kyā lauce (liye) ho? Hey Kallu!* [what are you having?]

DALAL: *Uncā rejā hē.* [It is a costly piece]

KOTHIDAR: *tigāo (dikhao) jarā, kyā damore (dam) kā hē?*[Just show, what is the price?]

DALAL: *Savā ikwāi (tin) kā he.* [Its price is Rs 325]

KOTHIDAR: *sāng (ēk) damorā (dām) bolo, dhālnā (becnā) ho to.* [Say one, i.e., fixed price, if you intend selling it.]

DALAL: *bud (pānc) cittā (ruṗya) khis (kam) kar lo.* [Reduce five rupees]

KOTHIDAR: *savā swān (do) sō kā sava ikwāi (tin) sō balu (bol) rahe ho. lagwārā (sō) birase (adhik)!* [You are demanding three

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hundred twenty five instead of two hundred twenty five. Hundred excess!]

DALAL: *itnā pharak wārā (pharak) nahin hē, āpko partā paruce (parē) to lo varna doli (vāpas) kardo* [There isn't that much of difference. If the price suits you, take it or return the same.]

KOTHIDAR: *phir vahi lingar gilōri (jid). salay (daś) tat (hajar) kā gahakōrā (gāhak) hē, li (vāpas) ho jāygā.* [Again that obstinate behaviour. Here is a customer likely to buy goods worth ten thousand rupees. He will quit otherwise.]

DALAL: *paratā nahin paruc (par) rahā hē, Kēse dhalucen (becen)?* [The cost is not being met. How can I sell?]

KOTHIDAR: *acchā salāi (das) ōr barhā dete hēn. tāpi (pitā) se gilori (salāh) kar lenā.* [O.K. Have ten rupees more. Consult your father.]

DALAL: *tāpiji (pitāji) ko bic me kyon lāte ho?* [Why do you bring my father into our midst?]

KOTHIDAR: *māl dhalucane (becane) āe ho yā larūcane (larne)? nānak cand (nahin) karvā denge.* [Have you come to sell goods or to pick up a quarrel? I'll ask him to say "no".]

DALAL: *to phir āp li (vāpas) kar dijiye.* [Then please return it.]

KOTHIDAR: *ādhe ghante men ahūciye (āiye) apnā rejā doli (vāpas) lejāiye.* [Come after half an hour and get back your sari.]

For a comparative look we can refer to an example of *Dalali Boli* as it occurs in a Hindi play *Prem Yogini* by Bhartendu Harish Chandra, written more than a hundred years ago. Here there is little difference in the nature of language-mix and the over-all syntactical pattern as compared to the *Dalali Boli* spoken today.

DALAL: *kā guru! kuch bohniwāre (bohni) kā tār (āsa) hoy to hambhi sāth hi calūnche (calen).* (Hey Guru, if there is hope of some gain from Panditji, I should also like to accompany.)

SUDHAKAR: *tār to panditwārā (pandit) hē. Kuch vises nahin jān partā.* (Not much hope as he is a pandit.)

DALAL: *tab bhi phok (cār) saure (sō) kā mālwārā (māl) kahān tak na lauciyē (lega).* (Still, why can't he buy goods worth four hundred rupees?)

*Sudhakar: ab jo palte-palte (lete-lete) pale (le).* (He may take what he wants).

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PANDIT: *yah inhone kis bhāśa men bāt ki?* (Which language did he talk in? )

SUDHAKAR: *yah kashi ki hi boli hē. ye dalal hēn, so pūchate the ki panditji kahan utarenge?* (This is a dialect of Banaras. He is a *dalal.* He was asking where would Panditji be staying?) (Harish Chandra 165).

A comparison of the two extracts just cited reveals that the overall pattern and the underlying principles of the formation of *Dalali Boli* were almost the same a hundred years ago as they are today. We shall now examine some of the linguistic features of *Dalali Boli* which give it a distinct character and are in keeping with the swindling role of *dalals.*

The lexical items which lend *Dalali Boli* its distinct character and look are of the following types:

1. Verbs, particularly verbs of action.
2. Nouns, particularly number, names and units of currency.
3. Some adjectives.

In my corpus of *Dalali Boli* verbs stand out prominently by having undergone the maximum degree of disguise. There is no other class of words which has been distorted and disfigured so much as the verb. The context being one of buying and selling through the process of bargaining, the verbs of action show the largest frequency of occurrence as well as the maximum degree of metamorphosis. There is hardly an activity pertaining to the domain of buying and selling of silk goods which has not been subjected to a wilful disguise by ingenious *dalals.* The high percentage of verbs in the limited vocabulary of *Dalali Boli* in particular, and in the restricted language of buying and selling (Mehrotra 1975) in general tends to emphasise acts and processes rather than things contrary to Bernstein's discovery, in a public language of a higher percentage of nouns and correspondingly greater emphasis on things (Bernstein 1959:313).

The language disguise as used by *dalals* is not arbitrary and haphazard but follows a fixed principle and a regular pattern. One such way of effecting language disguise is the adding of the particle *ucana* to a principal verb as in the examples in Table 3.1.

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TABLE 3.1

| *Argot Verb* | *Corresponding Term in ordinary language* | *Example* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| *milūcanā* | *milnā* (to meet) | *tapiji se milūc āo* (Meet the father) |
| *jacūcanā* | *acana* (to be liked) | *reja jacūc nahin rahā hē* (The piece is not to our liking) |
| *larūcanā* | (*i*) *larnā* (to quarrel) | *māl dhālne aē ho ya larucane?* (Have you come here to sell goods or to pick up a quarrel? |
| | (*ii*) *mukāblā honā* (to be compared) | *rejā larūc gayā* (The sari was compared) |
| *leūcanā* | *lenā* (to take) | *yah leūciyega?* (Would you like to take this ?) |
| *barhūcanā* | *barhānā* (to increase) | *salāy cittā ōr barhūciye* (increase Rs. 10 more) |
| *Lagūcanā* | *lagānā* (to fix) | *kyā damorā lagucē ho* (What price have you fixed ?) |
| *patūcanā* | (*i*) *patnā* (to meet the cost) | *Damorā nahin patucralē hē, kesē becen ?* (How can I sell, the price offered is not meeting the cost? ) |
| | (*ii*) *patānā* (to persuade) | *Kārīgar ko patuco* (Persuade the weaver) |
| *dabūcanā* | *dabānā* (to press) | *Kārigar ko dabuco, damora khis karāo* (Press the weaver, get the price reduced ) |
| *āucanā* | *ānā* (to come) | *ghante bhar me auciye* (come after an hour) |
| *jaucanā* | *jānā* (to go) | *gahkōrā jaūc rahā he* (the customer is going) |
| *calucanā* | *calnā* (to proceed) | *bohniwāre kā tār ho to ham bhi sath hi calueen* (If there is hope of gain, I should also like to accompany) |
| *tigūcanā* | *tīgnā, dekhna* (to see) | *georget tiguciyegā ?* (Would you like to see georget?) |
| *bharūcanā* | *bhārnā, lena* (to take) | *swān sō tak ho to bharūc lo* (take it if available for Rs. 200) |

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| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|
| *palūcanā* | *palna, dena* (to give) | *sut cittā ōr palūco* (Pay Rs 10 more) |
| *dhalūcanā* | *dhālnā, becna* (to sell) | *Kitni sari dhaluci ?* (How many saries have been sold? ) |

In the list given in Table 3.1 the verbs *tigūcanā, bharūcanā, palūcanā,* and *dhalūcanā* are cases of double disguise in the sense that the particle *ū canā* is added here to the items *tgianā, bharnā, palnā,* and *dhālna* respectively which are already part of their subterranean language not known to a layman.

Auxiliaries are normally borrowed from the dominant language and used in their original forms with the multilated main verbs. In an utterance like *damorā barhūc gayā hē or mālwārā doli kar do* auxiliaries *gāya hē* and *kar do* can easily be recognised as elements of common language. However, in a couple of cases, even auxiliaries are made to take the suffix *ūcanā* as in *parūcanā* for *parnā* [e.g., *partā nahin parūc rahā hē ;* The cost is not being met.] and

*Karūcanā* for *Karnā* [e.g., *rejā doli karūc do ;* Return the piece]

Sometimes the verbs borrowed from the ordinary language are given new meanings. The verbs listed in Table 3.2, for instance, mean one thing in the ordinary language and another in *Dalali Boli.*

TABLE 3.2

| *Verb* | *Meaning in ordinary language* | *Meaning in Dalali Boli* |
|---|---|---|
| *bharnā* | *to fill* | *to buy* |
| *galnā* | *to melt* | *to make payment* |
| *dhālnā* | *to mould* | *to sell* |
| *marnā* | *to die* | *to have one's demands fully met* |
| *ghālna* | *to destroy* | *to sell* |
| *doli karnō* | *to engage a palanquin* | *to return* |

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By a little stretch of imagination one can notice that most of the verbs listed in Table 3.2 are used figuratively in *Dalali Boli.*

There are, however, a few verbs which are frequently used in the lingo of *dalals* but are non-existent in the dominant language (Table 3.3). They appear to be cases of new coinage.

TABLE 3.3

| *Verb* | *Meaning* | *Example* |
|---|---|---|
| *thigānā* | *to put* | *rejā yahān thigā do* (Put the piece here) |
| *thignā* | *to be available* | *ismen ki sāri ghar men nahi thigti* (this kind of sari is not available in stock) |
| *chajjū honā* | to be defective | *tumhāri ek sāri chajjū ho gai hē.* (One of your saris has become defective) |
| *gilōrī karnā* | to persuade | *Kārigar se gilōrī kar damorā khis karāo* |
| *lingar karnā* | to antagonise | *dekho, tum gahkōre ko lingar kar rahe ho* (look, you are antagonising the customer) |
| *lingar gilōri karnā* | to prevaricate | *ab jyādā lingar gilori mat karo* (Don't prevaricate much now) |

Sometimes verbal phrases in *Dalali Boli* show a clean departure from the norm of the majority language both formally and semantically in so far as they combine elements which do not habitually co-occur in the source language and have subsequently different connotation. A comparison of the items under "A" in Table 3.4 with corresponding entries under "B" together with their respective meanings will bring out the contrast clearly.

The speaker of an argot has generally a limited stock of words and, therefore, he is obliged to express many ideas with the few words at his disposal. The paucity of argot words leads him to invest a given term with more than one meaning. This phenomenon has copiously been illustrated by Leslau in his analysis of *Kelamenna,* the Ethiopian merchant's argot. To cite a few examples as given by him, any person of importance whether a merchant, a king or a big guy or an aristocrat is *hawar.* "Any

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TABLE 3.4

| *Majority Language* | | *Dalali Boli* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Item* | *Meaning* | *Item* | *Meaning* |
| *bhāri honā* | to be heavy | *bhari rahna* or *bhari thignā* | to remain quiet, not to buy |
| *doli lānā* | to bring palanquin | *doli honā* | to return |
| *kōrī cukānā* | to pay off every farthing | *kōri (kōre) bhirānā* | to pay hard cash |
| *khiskānā* | to move slowly | *khis karna* | to lessen, to reduce |

pejorative qualification such as bad, stupid, short or small is expressed by the single *aycem*". The Ethiopian merchants are said to have no separate terms for "buy" and "sell". Both the notions are expressed by a single term *ēaggādā* which means "trade" (Leslau 1949: 22).

In the Indian context the language of *dalals* and to some extent the language of silk merchants in general exhibits the same phenomenon and possibly for the same reason. Thus the word *māṗ* or *maṗrā* in *Dalali Boli* can mean a weaver, customer, broker, servant, or Income-Tax Inspector depending upon the context. *Lallu Mal* will mean any of these things (1) "dull" as in *bazar Lallu Mal hē* (The market is dull), (2) "defective" as in *tumhārā rejā Lallu Mal hē* (Your piece is defective), (3) "stupid" as in *tum ho pūre Lallu Mal* (you are a stupid through and through). What is true of *Lallu Mal* (is equally true of another argot term *lihārā* which can easily replace *Lallu Mal* in all the three examples given above in exactly the same sense. Likewise, to express "hope" and "demand" they use the same term *tār*. An utterance in which the term is used in the sense of hope or expectation is *bohniwāre kā tār hē kuch?* (Is there hope of some profit?) The utterance in which the same term is used in the sense of "demand" is: *kis cij ki tār hē tumhāre yahān?* (What item is in demand at yours?) The single term *bharna* which ordinarily means "to fill" has two meanings in *Dalali Boli:* (1) "to buy" as in *yah reja bharnā hē?* (Do you want to buy this piece?) and (2) "to pay" as in *damorā bharnā hē?*

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(Do you want to make the payment?) Perhaps the most interesting item of this kind is *palnā* which can be used to denote the entirely opposite meanings—"to give" as well as "to take" depending upon the context in which the term is used. In the sentence *damorā āj paliyegā?* (Will you *give* the money today?) *palnā* means to "give" whereas in another sentence *yah reja paliyegā?* (Will you *take* this sari?) *palnā* means to "take". The distribution rule holds that when used in association with money, *palna* means "to give" but when used with reference to a commodity, it means "to take". The above comparison between the trade language of Indian and Ethiopian merchants reveals a striking parallellism in the pattern of argot formation and calls for further probing of merchants' argots in other countries and cultures.

Items other than the verb, particularly those belonging to the form noun are subjected to a more or less similar kind of manipulation in *Dalali Boli* for the purpose of secrecy. Some of the common devices of concealment are as follows.

### Use of Ordinary Words with Unusual and Extra-dictionary Meaning

Quite a few words in *Dalali Boli* are taken from the majority language but are given special meaning known only to the in-group members. Table 3.5 includes items of this type.

Often when it is felt that a particular secret term is no longer a secret, another term is invented in its place to denote the same idea. This *paise* (pice) can be expressed by any of these terms: *takta, chabbi,* and *ghoghi; rupiya* (rupee) by *citta* and *bajnā; dalal* (broker) by *gāul* and *tānku; dalali* (brokerage) by *gāuli* and *shobhā*; dam (price) by *damorā, ber, lārhe,* and *kōre.*

### Phonetic Disguise

In *Dalali Boli* the familiar terms of the dominant language are deliberately made to undergo a variety of phonetic changes so as to sound strange and unfamiliar to a layman. The change in phonetic shape, however, does not involve any change in meaning.

Like the particle *ucanā* which is suffixed to disguise a familiar verb, the particle *vārā* is added to a noun or an adjective for the

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TABLE 3.5

| *Words* | *Ordinary Meaning* | *Special Meaning in Dalali Boli* |
|---|---|---|
| *māp* | measurement | any man. Example: *māp se kaho kal āye* (Ask the man to come tomorrow); *māp ko thigāo* (make the man sit) |
| *lāng* | part of *(dhoti)* that is tucked up at the rear | One hundred. Example : *lāng lagā deyā hē* (One hundred has been fixed) |
| *tār* | a wire | (*i*) demand. Example : *kāhe ki tār hē āy?* (What is in demand today?)<br>(*ii*) hope. Example: *kuch āmdani ki tār ho to hām bhi rejā dikhā yen* (If there is hope of some profit, I should also like to show some pieces) |
| *cittā* | white | rupee. Example : *sāng cittā ṭalo* (Pay one rupee) |
| *bajnā* | to ring | rupee. Example : *bajnā barhā do* (Add one rupee) |
| *sut* | son | twenty. Example : *sut ki becoge?* (Will you sell it for twenty?) |
| *swān* | dog | two. Example : *swāno bhar lo* (Take both of them) |
| *budh* | Wednesday | five. Example : *budh cittā khis karo* (Reduce five rupees) |
| *tāt* | sack clo:h | thousand. Example: *salāy tāt ki hamen āj jarārat hē* (We need ten thousand today) |
| *lakari* | stick | lac, a hundred thousand. Example : *lakari kā gahakora hē* (The customer is expected to buy goods worth one lac rupees) |
| *marh* | dead body | one difficult to tackle. Example : *kārigar marh hē, damorē khis nahin karegā* (The weaver is difficult to manage, he won't reduce the price) |
| sikke | coins | payment with a single deduction of trade discount. Example : *pacās rupayē sikke milenge* (You will get Rs 50 with only one deduction of trade discount) |

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same purpose. The following are illustrative: *mālwārā* for *māl* (goods); *potwārā* for *pot* (texture); *tārwārā* for *tār* (hope, demand); *Muslimwārā* for Muslim; *Panditwārā* for Pandit; *Maltiwārā* for Malti; *gaulwārā* for *gaul* (broker); *berwārā* for *ber* (payment, price); *greenwārā* for green; *satāywārā* for *satāy* (cheap); and so on. The full utterances in which some of the words with the suffix *wārā* occur are: *kuch mālwārā tigōā* (show some goods); *potwārā cāu honā cāhiye* (the texture should be fine); *berwārā nakad palenge* (I shall make cash payment); Just as the particle *ucanā* can be added to almost any verb, *vārā* can be added to any noun or adjective for the purpose of secrecy.

Sometimes instead of ending with *wārā* a lexical item is made to end just with *rā* as in *māprā* for *māp* (a person), *saurā* for *sō* (hundred). In a few cases *orā* is added, but the initial vowel is shortened; *damorā* for *dām* (price), *kamorā* for *kām*, and *gahakōrā* for *gāhak* are examples of this type. It does not seem to be possible to think of a distribution rule of such formations. It is not clear as to why the same particle is not added to the items of identical phonetic pattern, i.e., *māp*, *dām*, and *kām*. Why is it that the formations *dāmrā* and *kāmrā* after the pattern *māprā* are not acceptable in *Dalali Boli*? There is thus a certain amount of arbitrariness in argot formations.

Transposition is another common device of phonetic disguise. Thus *pitā* (father) becomes *tāpi* and *doli* (return) becomes *lido* as in the sentence *tāpiji se pūch kar āo ki rejā doli kar den* (Go and ask the father if the piece is to be returned). Deletion is yet another such device. The term *doli* as in the phrase *doli karnā* which means "to return" is reduced to a single phoneme *li* while retaining the same meaning. Here is an example: *damorā birase hē, li kar do* (The price is high, return it).

One of the popular devices of language disguise in our country has been the practice to make use of personal names in special sense so as to give a slip to the out-group members. Thus in the argot of thugs *Ganga Ram* means "danger ahead" (Sleeman 1836); in the lingo of West Bengal criminals *Pyare Lal* means one who earns a living by making his wife act as a prostitute (Malik 1971), in the secret language of pandas *Larhe Ram* stands for money. The *dalals*, it seems, have made the maximum possible use of this device in their special lingo.

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As has been pointed out in chapter 4, the *dalals* have evolved an elaborate system of secret number names for communication among in-group members. These asoteric number names are made deceptive by giving them the look of familiar personal names with a little twist here and there. Some such formations are listed in Table 3.6.

TABLE 3.6

| *Secret Number Name* | *Number* | *Corresponding personal name* |
|---|---|---|
| *ikwāi* | three | Ikwai Chand |
| *fok* | four | Foku Lal/Feku Lal |
| *budh* | five | Buddhu Mal |
| *dahak* | six | Dahaku Das |
| *Pēnt* | seven | Paint Chand |
| *mang* | eight | Mangu Das |
| *jōlāy* | twelve | Jaulay ji |
| *rakhlāy* | thirteen | Rakhlay Mal |
| *sut* | twenty | Sut ji |

Suppose a weaver is offered Rs 110 for a particular sari and the wholesale customer sitting at the shop is prepared to pay Rs 10 more. The latter, who is also conversant with *Dalali Boli*, will say to the owner of the shop *Sutji se āp mile the* (Did you meet Sutji?) The seller who in most cases happens to be the weaver or manufacturer himself ignores the statement thinking that Sutji must be the name of someone and that he is not the least concerned with him while the shopkeeper takes the term *out* in its special sense denoting "twenty".

The use of personal names is not confined to the expression of a particular number but is also used to convey instructions which are crucial to the *dalas* and other wholesale dealers. Look at the following illustrations of the use of personal names in special sense and also note the situations in which they are used :

NANAK CHAND: When someone comes to take payment and the shopkeeper does not want to make the payment that day, he orders his assistant thus *jao, Nanak Chand se rupaye le ao* (Go, bring money from Nanak Chand) so that payment can be

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made to this man. The servant takes the hint *(Nanak Chand* signifying "no" from Hindi *nā* which is the initial syllable in the name) and after sometime returns with some such excuse, "Nanak Chand was not available", "Nanak Chand has asked to come after a week" and so on. The man returns empty handed without doubting the sincerity of the shopkeeper.

LALLU MAL: This name is uttered when at the time of buying and selling at *satti*, an associate or a dalal discovers a defect in the item being bargained but the person bargaining being unmindful of it. The associate says *Lallu Mal*, the shopkeeper becomes cautious and returns the piece.

DOLI DAS: This is an instruction to return a particular object or person being discussed. Suppose an item is being bargained and the associate feels it to be a bad bargain, he utters the name *Doli Das* in some imaginary context as in *Doli Das ke yahān hame jānā hē* (We have to go to Doli Das) and the object is returned.

KHAIRATI LAL: This name is deliberately used in an opening sentence by a *dalal* when he wants commission at the rate of six paise per rupee or 6.25 per cent on the purchases made by a customer brought by him. Example: *Khairati Lalji, Namaskar, kuch sariyan dikhaiye* (Greetings, Mr Khairati Lal, show us some saries). It is to be remembered that the customer is made to understand that *Khairati Lal* is the name of the shopkeeper being addressed while in fact it is an expansion of the code *Khare se* which means "six paise per rupee".

MANGAL DAS: *Mangal Das* is of the same type as *Khairati Lal* with the difference that *Mangal Das* signifies the rate of commission as *Mangal se* i.e., 12 paise per rupee or 12.5 per cent whereas *Khairati Lal* signifies six paise per rupee.

GUDARI MAL: This name signifies the rate of commission as three paisa per rupee.

It will be noticed that by using the familiar name endings as *Das, Lal, Mal, Chand,* and *ji* with his secret code, the *dalal* is able to stupefy the outsiders and communicate secretly with the in-group associates and traders. David Geller has brought to our notice similar tactics used by the shoe salesman in the United States. For instance, if a customer in a shoe-store wants to have 'B' width, in order to convince him that that is what he is getting

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"the salesman will call to another salesman down the aisle and say, *Benny*, what size is this shoe? By calling the salesman *Benny*, he implies that the answer should be that the width is "B" (Geller 1934: 285).

## Ambiguous Utterances

Ambiguity of statements is a characteristic feature of *Dalali Boli*. The *dalals* seem to be past masters in the art of assigning double meaning to their statements—one for the members of their inner circle, another for those outside it. The ambiguous statements of *dalals* fall into the following categories.

### *Sidhi Boli* (Plain Language Trick)

*Sidhi Boli* consists of utterances which are all drawn from the dominant language and are used by *dalals* exactly in the same form without any twist or manipulation but surreptitiously conveying a special meaning at the receiving end. Items conveying double meaning in utterances of this kind do not belong to the slang vocabulary of *dalals*. Such items used by the same speakers in contexts other than those of buying and selling may not be ambiguous at all. It is the physical situation present before the *dalal* at the time of speaking which is exploited for picking up items and lending double meaning to them. Suppose a bargain has just started about a silk sari, the *dalal* addressing the trader says, *bas, iskā ek hi dām bolnā* (That will do, say the real price for this). Here the phrase *ek hi dām* (one or final price) conveys to the shopkeeper the dalal's demand for one anna per rupee or 6.25 per cent by way of his commission. Now, if the shopkeeper's price for a given piece is Rs 400, he will not sell it for less than Rs 425; Rs 25 going to the *dalal* later on. In the like manner if he wishes to demand his commission at the rate of 25 per cent (i.e., four annas per rupee) and if he happens to see four persons working in the shop, he will say *is bār cār hi ādmi dikhai de rahe hēn, ōr log chutti per hēn kyā*? (This time only four workers are to be seen; are others on leave?) If he visits a shop where he does not find four workers, he will make another statement to convey the same demand, *kal jo cār sāri āpne bheji thi, sab kharid li hēn hamne* (We have bought all the four saries which you sent yesterday). It is

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immaterial if the statement happens to be fictitious and no saries were actually bought and sold on the previous day as indicated in the statement. This method of communication requires considerable cleverness and presence of mind on the part of both the participants—the *dalal* and the trader. The trader's ears by constant practice become fully trained as to what word in the dalal's statement to be caught as signalling the rate of his commission.

*Jhirki ki Dalali* (The Swagger Trick)

According to this method, the *dalal* is required to assume the role of a superior, and the shopkeeper that of an inferior. The *dalal*, in accordance with this assumed role, behaves in a domineering way and talks in a boastful manner. Entering the shop he snubs and scolds the shopkeeper for one thing or the other in presence of the customer who feels happy that the *dalal* is taking *his* side and fighting for his benefit as a sincere well-wisher. The way he behaves and the hectering tone in which he speaks gives the impression as if he were the lord and master of the whole establishment. But the shopkeeper does not mind this feigned snubbing and takes it with the levity it deserves. In course of his snubbing and scolding the *dalal* manages to convey his demand to the shopkeeper by using a simple code of word-signals embedded in the scolding language in a natural manner. The following specimens will illustrate this kind of trickery.

I want commission at the rate of three paisa per rupee: In order to convey this demand the *dalal* manages to smuggle the following utterance in the midst of his opening sentences: *hamen tājā māl dikhāo, yah raddi māl gudarī bazar men bhejo* (Show us fresh goods, send these to the lumber market). Here *gudarī* which ordinarily means rags or lumber is an established code for three paisa per rupee.

I want commission at the rate of six paisa or one anna per rupee: This rate of commission is conveyed by a *dalal* in the following manner: *kyon kharāb māl dikhāte ho, kharā kharā māl dikhāo vernā ham dūsri dukān par cale jāyegen* (Why are you showing bad things; show us good things or we will go to the other shop).

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The dictionary meaning of *kharā* is good or pure while the extra-dictionary meaning of the word in *Dalali Boli* is *six paisa per rupee*. Thus the message is well taken by the shopkeeper.

I WANT NINE PAISA PER RUPEE: *dikho hamāre tumhāre vyavahār men pharak na parne pāye nahin to tumhāri sakal dekhnā bhi pasand nahin karenge* (Look, there shouldn't be any flaw in our dealings or I wouldn't like to see your face even). Here *vyavahār* has two meanings: (*a*) dealings (in the ordinary language) and (*b*) nine paisa per rupee (in *Dalali Boli*).

I WANT TWO ANNAS OR TWELVE PAISA PER RUPEE: In order to convey this demand the dalal will refer to a particular sari and say: *yah sari dangal-mangal men dikhāo, hamen bilkul nahin pasand hē* (Show this sari at an auspicious wrestling tournament, we don't like it at all). The term *mangal* ordinarily means "auspicious" but its restricted meaning for *dalals* is "two annas per rupee".

I WANT FIVE ANNAS PER RUPEE: This is conveyed thus: *kyā dikhā rahe ho? isko hatāo. tumhāri buddhi māri gai hē? koi achhi cij dikhāo* (What are you showing? Take this away. Have you lost your wits? Show us some nice things). The patent meaning of *buddhi* is "wisdom" while *budh* in *Dalali Boli* stands for five, implying in the present instance that the *dalal* would be charging five annas per rupee on the total purshase made by the customer.

*Gēr-jhirki ki Dalali* (THE NON-SWAGGER TRICK)

The ambiguous statements included in this category differ from those in the second category in that they do not involve any snubbing or scolding. Such statements are made in a normal straightforward manner and more importantly, are drawn from the immediate situation of discourse. Here are a few examples.

I WANT 8 PAISA PER RUPEE: When the *dalal* wishes to demand 8 paisa per rupee, he will see to it that a sentence like the following is used in his introductory remark addressed to the shopkeeper, *tumhāre larke ki mangni ho gai hē?* (Has your son been engaged?) In the ordinary language *mangni* means "engagement" but in the present context it points out a specific item in *Dalali Boli* namely *mang* which means "eight".

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I WANT 10 PAISA PER RUPEE: In order to convey this demand the *dalal* will use the following sentence in his initial conversation with the shopkeeper, *is sāri ke bāre men āp ki kyā salāh hē?* (What is your advice regarding this sari?) Here the ordinary Hindi word *salāh* (advice) stands for the *dalali* slang *salāy* meaning "ten". Although the shopkeeper's outward response to the question would be *sāri bahut acchi hē* (The sari is nice) or some such statement, yet in point of fact he decides to add 10 per cent commission for the *dalal* according to his demand just conveyed.

I WANT 13 PAISA PER RUPEE: Addressing the shopkeeper or his associate and pointing at a particular sari, the *dalal* would be saying *Bhaiyā, yah sāri idhar rakh* (Brother, put this sari here). Ordinarily, *rakh* means "put" but in *Dalali Boli* it refers to *rakh lāy* meaning "thirteen".

I WANT 25 PAISA PER RUPEE: When the *dalal* desires 25 per cent commission, addressing the shopkeeper or his associate he says, *kyā kone men bēthe ho lālā?* (Why are you sitting in the corner, gentleman?) or else, *kuch acchi sariyān dikhāiyō, mēn yahān kone men bēthā hun* (Show us some nice saries, I am sitting in the corner here) or any other sentence exploiting the *present* situation in which the expression *kone men* occurs. *Kone men* means "in the corner" in the ordinary language but "four annas per rupee" in *Dalali Boli.*

Even a casual look at the ambiguous statements given above will reveal that their use is confined to the expression of only one thing—the rate at which the *dalal* wishes to charge his commission. If the same were told to the shopkeeper in the ordinary language, the customer would immediately leave the place without buying anything.

### NON-AMBIGUOUS UTTERANCES

Such utterances form the major bulk of *Dalali Boli.* They cover a wide variety of topics. To mention just a few, they are used to discuss whether a particular piece at a given price is worth buying or not; whether a *dalal* is involved in the deal; whether the payment will be available in cash and without deductions; whether a particular customer is to be given goods on credit;

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if yes, to what extent; whether an item is to be retained or returned; whether a customer is to be detained or dismissed; which items in a lot presented for sale are to be selected and which rejected and so on.

An important characteristic of the utterances of this category is that even formally they are distinguishable from the ordinary day-to-day speech because most of the items of vocabulary here have a new and unfamiliar look either due to purposeful invention or a systematic distortion of the familiar items. Such utterances are absolutely unintelligible to a layman and often cause a feeling of suspicion in the mind of the customers. The following extracts from the tape-recorded corpus of *Dalali Boli* illustrate utterances of this kind:

*greenwārā swāndahāl fok kā cāuhē* (The green one is worth buying for twenty four rupees)
*māp lāng budh ka bharen to pal lo* (If the guy is prepared to sell it for hundred and five, take it)
*partā pare to dhalūco* (Sell if the cost is met)
*bajnā khis karo to khāpayen* (If you reduce one rupee, we can take it)
*budh dahāi palle se jauc rahā hē, kōn dene ahūcega?* (It is fifty rupees below the cost, who will give it)
*ye swāno thigāe na?* (Shall we take both of these?)
*tānku khare panch hē* (The accompanying *dalal* demands one anna per rupee by way of commission)
*rejā lihara hē, li karo* (The piece is no good, return it)
*gahkōrā marh hē* (The customer is difficult to handle)
*māp ko nānak chand karo* (Say "no" to this man)
*berwara sikke paliyegā* (Make the payment without trade discount)

The *Dalali Boli* of the Banaras silk market has its own set of secret number names ranging from one to a hundred thousand which I have discussed in chapter 4. Furthermore, the special parlance of *dalals* engaged in the silk industry of Banaras is not identical with the speech of *dalals* in the same trade in other places or with the *dalals* dealing with any other commodity in the same town. For instance, the *dalals* of grain market, jewellery market, cotton goods market in Banaras will each speak a different kind

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of dialect strictly confined to their distinct profession. The possession of such secret professional dialects helps their speakers to maintain their group-exclusiveness and also to carry on their profession, legitimate or illegitimate with ease and confidence.

*Dalali Boli* is of considerable sociolinguistic interest in so far as its rules and practices are both similar to and different from those of the majority language, namely Hindi, and also in so far as its distinct characteristics particularly those aiming at concealment are related to "the characteristics of the communicators or the communicating situation" (Fishman 1967: 590). Although relying heavily on the majority language this supplementary superposed tongue with a high degree of esoteric playfulness has "enough of a distinct character" to make it stand by its own right. It is not merely a "defensive code against outsiders" (Polsky 1967: 107) but also an integral necessitous part of the profession and role of its speakers, and an effective means of reinforcing their group identity or "we-feeling".

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# 4

# Secret and Secondary Number-Names: A Functional Perspective

Number-names, by common consent, are the oldest and the best defined words of a language, as mathematics is undisputedly the oldest of the sciences. They form a significant part of the lexicon of a given language and belong to the category of language universals (Murdock 1945:124). Speaking generally, the number sense of a community leads to the growth of a corresponding number language consisting of a limited number of lexicon and figures and a set of specific rules, although its actual ability to count is somewhat greater than is indicated by its vocabularies (Conant 1923:21). The language of Andaman Islands, for instance, as that of the Veddas of Sri Lanka, has number words only for one and two. Smith (vol. I:6) has mentioned in this context the numerals of no fewer than thirty Australian languages[1] which do not extend beyond four. This does not, however, mean that they cannot distinguish four birds from five or fifty birds. They have all evolved different devices of numerations, of rather concrete nature, to make up for the paucity of appropriate language labels for various numbers.

The numeral expressions of a language thus constitute "a closed corpus of material" and it is possible to isolate them from the general body of a given language and examine them independently. Quite a few studies in recent years have concentrated on the grammatical aspects of number-names mainly from a transformational generative perspective. Seven studies compiled Corstius (1968) are remarkable contributions in this direction. Pandit's (1972) analysis of the number-names of Gujarati, Tamil and Suarastri; Kelkar's (1966) examination of the number-names

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of Chinese and Bright's (1972) treatment of the morphophonemic aspect of Hindi numerals are all concerned with the grammar of number language. Waterson (1966:454-74) has tried to establish a separate category of numerals in Uzbek with a view to showing "how the concept of colligation and collocation can be used in grammatical analysis." Gokhale (1966) has studied Indian numerals from yet another angle as she is concerned only with the evolutionary aspect of the graphical representation of number in India covering a period of one thousand years between B.C. 390 and 750 A.D. The present study is different from the earlier studies of numerals both in nature and approach. Firstly the subject matter of this study is the restricted and esoteric number language, both verbal and non-verbal, used by various professional groups of Varanasi and a few other religo-commercial centres of north India. Secondly, the approach here is not generative but the one generally known as a functional approach to language which, to quote Halliday (1973:7), "means seeking to explain the nature of language in functional terms: seeking whether language itself has been shaped by use, and if so, in what ways—how the form of language has been determined by the functions it has evolved to serve". In other words the purpose here is to study number language in relation to what Firth (1957:22) calls "social conditions of use".

It is important to define here related terms like "numeral" and "number-name" and bring out the distinction, if any, between them. Numeral, according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, is a figure, letter or word or a group of any of these, expressing a number, i.e., 1, 2, 12, 32; one, two, twelve, thirty-two. This is, however, a broad definition of the term numeral which is not acceptable to either a mathematician or a linguist, who again do not share the same view on the subject. Whereas Menninger (1969:54) takes the term numeral exclusively in the sense of a figure, i.e., "4" being called "number-word" by him, linguists like Firth (1957:2) do not include figures in the term "numeral" which to them stands only for number words: one, two, three, etc. The term "number-name" again, does not mean the same to different specialists. To avoid confusion, Brainerd (1966) makes a further classification of number-name into what he calls "a verbal number-name" and "a numeral number-name": sixteen thousand and three hundred forty being an example of the former

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and 16340 of the latter. The former system of notation is believed to have been invented by Bramhagupta and designated as "numerical words" (Kaye 1907: 479) although it was mostly of symbolic nature. For the purposes of the present study the terms number-names will refer only to verbal number names as numeral number-names fall outside the scope of this study; the use of secret number-names being confined to oral medium only.

Our concern, then, in the present paper is with the secondary number-names which exist side by side primary number names and are used only for certain specific purposes requiring secrecy without in any way interfering with the domain of the primary scale already in vogue. In India we have had an ancient tradition, particularly in Sanskrit works, of denoting numbers by words other than the usual names of the numerals. Witness Tylor who merits a rather detailed citation:

> People possessing full sets of inherited numerals in their own language have nevertheless sometimes found it convenient to invent new ones. Thus, the scholars of India, ages ago selected a set of words from a memoria technica in order to record dates and numbers. These words they chose for reasons which are still in great measure evident; thus 'moon' or 'earth' expressed 1, there being but one of each; 2 might be called 'eye', 'wing', 'arm', 'jaw' as going in pairs; for 3 they said 'Rama', 'fire' or 'quality', there being considered to be three Ramas, three kinds of fire, three qualities (guna); for 4 were used 'Veda', 'age' or 'ocean', there being four of each recognised; season for 6, because they reckoned six seasons; 'sage' or 'vowel' for 7, from the seven sages and the seven vowels; and so on with high numbers; 'sun' for 12 because of his twelve annual denominations and 'nail' for 20, a word incidently bringing in a finger notation. As Sanskrit is very rich in synonyms, and as even the numerals themselves might be used, it becomes very easy to draw up phrases or nonsense verses to record series of numbers by this system of artificial memory (Tylor 1958:251-2).

This use of expressing numbers by symbolic words was mostly confined to poetical work mainly for prosodic purposes and partly also for the delight which this playful habit imparted to its users. Alberuni, the Arabic traveller and scholar (973-1043 A.D.), who

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spent many years in India, has given an elaborate list of such symbolic words prevalent in his time (Sachau 1964: 177-8):

0—*Śunya* (point)
*gagana* (sky)
*akāś* (sky)
*ambar* (sky)
1—*adi* (the beginning)
*Sasi* (moon)
*Sita* (Rama's wife)
*Pitamah* (the first father)
*rupa* (form)
2—*yama* (the god of death)
*āświn* (the seventh month of the Hindu calender)
*ravi-candra* (the sun and the moon)
*locan* (eyes)
*netra* (eyes)
*paksha* (the two halves of month)
3—*trikāla* (the three parts of time)
*pavak* (fire)
*triguna* (the three virtues)
*loka* (the worlds: earth, heaven and hell)
4—*Veda* (it has four parts)
*Samudra* (sea)
*diśa* (the four cardinal points)
*Jalāsaya* (tank)
5—*artha* (money)
*indriya* (the five senses)
*bāna* (arrow)
*bhūta* (the five elements: the earth, the water, the air, the fire and the ether)
*Pāndava* (the five royal brothers)
6—*rasa* (the flavour)
*anga* (Limb)
*ritu* (season)
7—*parvata* (the mountains)
*adri*
*muni* (ascetic)
8—*vasu* (gods who are eight in number)
*adhi*

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9—*chidra* (hole)
*pavan* (wind)
*randhra* (hole)
10—Ravan-*sira* (the ten heads of Ravana)
11—Rudra (the destroyer of the world)
Mahadev (Lord Shiva)
*askhauni* (the army as one had by Kuru)
12—Surya (Sun, there are believed to be twelve suns)
13—*viśva* (world)
14—Manu (the Lord of the 14 *manvantars*)
15—*tithi* (the lunar days in each half month)
20—*nakha* (Nail)
25—*tattva* (the 25 things through the knowledge of which liberation is obtained)

Alberuni's list of symbolic numerical notation does not go beyond 25 although others have given symbolic words for numbers as far as 48. In some cases as many as 40 items are given for one particular number. Thus, the phrase "yugakhendurpa" signifies the number 1104 [i.e., Yugas (4), the sky (0), the moon (100) and the rupa (1000)=1104] the smaller numbers being written first, in that order. The year "saka samvat 867" (935 or 946 A.D.) was given by "girirasa-vasu" meaning the mountains (seven), the flavours (six) and gods "vasu" (who were eight in number), i.e. 867, the words being read from right to left. Varah Mihir's *Brahat Samhita* (chapter VIII) is particularly rich in examples of this type.

Besides the word-system given above and the figure system known universally the Hindus had one more system of numeration known as alphabetical system which is said to have been introduced by the great Indian mathematician Aryabhat. Thus the first 25 letters constituting classfied consonants (from *Ka* to *Ma*) were used to denote numbers 1 to 25. The unclassified consonants (from *ya* to *sa*) were used for the tens from 30 onward. Vowels were meant to indicate multipliers. Thus, *i*, *ī* and *u* would indicate multiplication by 100, 1000 and 10000 respectively. It is believed that Panini also denoted numbers by the letters of the alphabet (Kaye 1907:478).

Ordinarily a number sequence is independent of things and can be used to count anything. We can, for instance, say

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four men, four chairs, four tickets, and so on. But in a few cases different sets of number-words are used to count different kinds of objects. Number no longer remains an abstract concept independent of things but becomes concretised and associated with specific objects. There are no fewer than 14 different classes of numerals in Japanese, each tied to a specific kind of object. The oft-quoted example of the Tsimshian language of British Columbia is another striking case in point. There we find seven distinct sets of number-names for various classes of objects: one for counting flat objects and animals; one for round objects and time; one for counting men; one for long objects and trees; one for canoes; one for measures, and one for counting "where there is no definite object referred to". Thus in their language two men are called "*tepquadal*" *men*, but two balls are "*goapel*" *balls* and two canoes "*galpeetk*" *canoes* (Conant 1923: 87). Thus a given set of number-names, in some cases at least, is tied to some specific objects and cannot, therefore, be used to count any object. Even in our time pair, couple, set, team, twain brace are varying ways of expressing the same idea "two" in accordance with the nature of the object being counted.

Much of the data on which the present study is based was collected in Varanasi, my native town which is also believed to be the birth-place of the Indian arithmetic (Dwivedi 1910:41). In course of field investigation in Varanasi I have been able to unearth five sets of secret and secondary number-names within a radius of one kilometer around the famed Vishwanath temple. These sets are used respectively by the silk merchants and *dalals* (brokers), diamond dealers, fruit and vegetable merchants, *pandas* of various categories—each of these constituting a small and stable community. My family has been associated with the silk industry of Varanasi for more than a hundred years and this has been of considerable advantage to me in presenting and analysing the secret number-names of silk merchants. The data covering other groups has been derived from the actual usage of my informants representing those groups. The informants, after they were brought into confidence, were asked to count in their secret code from one to ten and the results were noted. Later on the data were verified by observing other members of groups using number-names in their secret transactions. For a comparative look I have also collected secret number-names used by *dalals* of

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Delhi, thugs of north India and West Bengal and *pandas* of Mathura and Gaya, two of the six most important centres of Hindu pilgrimage. It would be appropriate to give, in the form of tables, the structural patterns of number sets just referred to before embarking upon an analysis and comparison. It is important to note that all but two sets (Tables 4.10 and 4.11) of secret number-names are being published here for the first time.

TABLE 4.1 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY SILK MERCHANTS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Number* | *Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *sāng* | 11 | *iklāy* |
| 2 | *swān* | 12 | *jolāy* |
| 3 | *ikwāi* | 13 | *rakhlāy* |
| 4 | *fok* | 14 | *foklāy* |
| 5 | *bud* | 15 | *budlāy* |
| 6 | *dahak* | 16 | *dahaklāy* |
| 7 | *pēnt* | 17 | *pēntlāy* |
| 8 | *mang* | 18 | *manglāy* |
| 6 | *kon* | 19 | *konlāy* |
| 10 | *salāy* | 20 | *sūt* |

TABLE 4.2 SECRET NUMBERS-NAMES USED BY SILK MERCHANTS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Alternative Forms* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21 | *swān dahāi sāng* | *Sangūpar swān dahāi* | *swān sāng* |
| 22 | *swān dahāi swān* | *swān ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān swān* |
| 23 | *swān dahāi ikwāi* | *ikwan ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān ikwāi* |
| 24 | *swān dahāi fok* | *fok ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān fok* |
| 25 | *swān dahāi bud* | *bud ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān bud* |
| 26 | *swān dahāi dahak* | *dahak ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān dahak* |
| 27 | *swān dahāi pēnt* | *pēnt ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān pēnt* |
| 28 | *swān dahāi mang* | *mang ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān mang* |
| 29 | *swān dahāi kon* | *kon ūpar swān dahāi* | *swān kon* |
| 30 | *ikwāi dahāi* | | |
| 31 | *ikwāi dahāi sāng* | *sāng ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi sāng* |
| 32 | *ikwāi dahāi swān* | *swān ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi swān* |
| 33 | *ikwāi dahāi ikwāi* | *ikwāi ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi ikwāi* |

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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 34 | *ikwāi dahāi fok* | *fok ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi bud* |
| 35 | *ikwāi dahāi bud* | *bud ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi bud* |
| 36 | *ikwāi dahāi dahak* | *dahak ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi dahak* |
| 37 | *ikwāi dahāi pēnt* | *pēnt ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi pēnt* |
| 38 | *ikwāi dahāi mang* | *mang ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi mang* |
| 39 | *ikwāi dahāi kon* | *kon ūpar ikwāi dahāi* | *ikwāi kon* |
| 40 | *Fok dahāi* | | |
| 41 | *fok dahāi sāng* | *sāng ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok sāng* |
| 42 | *fok dahāi swān* | *swān ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok swān* |
| 43 | *fok dahāi ikwāi* | *ikwāi ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok ikwāi* |
| 44 | *fok dahāi fok* | *fok ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok fok* |
| 45 | *fok dahāi bud* | *bud ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok bud* |
| 46 | *fok dahāi dahak* | *dahak ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok dahak* |
| 47 | *fok dahāi pēnt* | *pēnt ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok pēnt* |
| 48 | *fok dahāi mang* | *mang ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok mang* |
| 49 | *fok dahāi kon* | *kon ūpar fok dahāi* | *fok kon* |
| 50 | *bud dahāi* | | |
| 60 | *dahak dahāi* | | |
| 70 | *pēnt dahāi* | | |
| 80 | *mang dahāi* | | |
| 90 | *Kon dahāi* | | |
| 100 | *legwārā* | | |
| 1000 | *tāt* | | |
| 10000 | *salāy tāt* | | |
| 100000 | *lakari* | | |

TABLE 4.3 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY DIAMOND DEALERS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Number* | *Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *airan pā* | 11 | *gyāgar* |
| 2 | *thāl pā* | 12 | *bābar* |
| 3 | *bābar pā* | 13 | *tirpar* |
| 4 | *āirvan* | 14 | *cōpar* |
| 5 | *sūt pā* | 15 | *pālo birāyate* |
| 6 | *citti* | 16 | *citti birāyate* |
| 7 | *būli* | 17 | *būli birāyate* |
| 8 | *thāl* | 18 | *thāl birāyate* |
| 9 | *nahali* | 19 | *nahali birāyate* |
| 10 | *dhōt* | 20 | *sūt* |

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TABLE 4.4 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY DIAMOND DEALERS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Number* | *Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | *sut ūpar airan pā* | 30 | *bābar pā dahāi* |
| 22 | *sut ūpar thāl pā* | 40 | *āiran pā dahāi* |
| 23 | *sut ūpar bābar pā* | 50 | *sut pā dahāi* |
| 24 | *sut ūpar aīran* | 60 | *citti dahāi* |
| 25 | *sut ūpar sutpā* | 70 | *būli dahāi* |
| 26 | *sut ūpar citti* | 80 | *thāl dahāi* |
| 27 | *sut ūpar būli* | 90 | *nahali dahāi* |
| 28 | *sut ūpar thāl* | 100 | *dhōt dahāi* |
| 29 | *sut ūpar nahali* | | |

TABLE 4.5 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY FRUIT AND VEGETABLE MERCHANTS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Number* | *Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *nimā* | 11 | *jaulāy* |
| 2 | *jōr* | 12 | *barsvāy* |
| 3 | *rag* | 13 | *note ōr rag* |
| 4 | *fok* | 14 | *note ōr fok* |
| 5 | *bud* | 15 | *note ōr bud* |
| 6 | *pochari* | 16 | *note ōr dahak* |
| 7 | *pēnt* | 17 | *note ōr pēnt* |
| 8 | *mājhi* | 18 | *note ōr mājhi* |
| 9 | *kon* | 19 | *note ōr kon* |
| 10 | *note* | 20 | *ghonghā* |

TABLE 4.6 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY PANDAS OF BANARAS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Number* | *Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *sāng* | 9 | *nakhū* |
| 2 | *javar* | 10 | *salāy* |
| 3 | *singhārā* | 11 | *ekadash* |
| 4 | *fok* | 15 | *landar* |
| 5 | *pānro* | 25 | *māsā* |
| 6 | *mithuni* | 50 | *khardā, adhākur* |
| 7 | *salākhu* | 100 | *sambhal* |
| 8 | *atthū* | | |

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TABLE 4.7 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY PANDAS OF KASHI KARHAT

| Number | Number-Name | Number | Number-Name |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *dev* | 6 | *kothū* |
| 2 | *mahā* | 7 | *shalaki* |
| 3 | *adale* | 8 | *thahā* |
| 4 | *ravā* | 9 | *nakku* |
| 5 | *tandale* | 10 | *dasain* |

TABLE 4.8. SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY PANDAS OF MATHURA

| Number | Number-Name | Number | Number-Name |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *cattā* | 7 | *riśī* |
| 2 | *dukarī* | 8 | *vasu* |
| 3 | *netra* | 9 | *graha* |
| 4 | *fok* | 10 | *note* |
| 5 | *halthū* | 100 | *asli* |
| 6 | *khat* | | |

TABLE 4.9 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY PANDAS OF GAYA

| Number | Number-Name | Number | Number-Name |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *sūng* | 7 | *joganā singhārā sāng* |
| 2 | *jognūa* | 8 | *joganā kūsōr* |
| 3 | *singhārā* | 9 | *joganā kusōr sāng* |
| 4 | *kusōr* | 10 | *joganā barmhāt* |
| 5 | *barmhāt* | 50 | *adhākur* |
| 6 | *joganā singhārā* | 100 | *ākur* |

TABLE 4.10 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY DALALS OF DELHI

| Number | Number-Name | Number | Number-Name |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *ekal* | 7 | *pānt* |
| 2 | *swān* | 8 | *majh* |
| 3 | *rakh* | 9 | *wāh* |
| 4 | *phuk* | 10 | *salāh* |
| 5 | *budh* | 11 | *akalā* |
| 6 | *kalangan* | | |

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TABLE 4.11 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES USED BY THUGS

| *Number* | *Number-Name* | *Number* | *Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *yetu* | 7 | *sathuni* |
| 2 | *bitrī* | 10 | *desur* |
| 3 | *sancod* | 100 | *māhi* |
| 4 | *wodli* | 1000 | *hacade* |
| 5 | *panchurā* | 2000 | *docade* |
| 6 | *serlue, ceru* | 10000 | *descade* |

None of the basic number-names used by silk merchants (Tables 4.1 and 4.2), diamond dealers (Tables 4.3 and 4.4), fruit and vegetable merchants (Table 4.5) and *dalals* of Delhi (Table 4.10) have any phonological resemblance with the number names of any of the languages spoken in north India although each of these major languages has striking similarity with every other language of the group so far as their number-names are concerned, a similarity which Emaneau (1967:139) rates high for determining relationship among languages. A comparison of the number-names upto ten given earlier in Tables 4.1, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.10 with their counterparts in some major Indian languages will highlight separate identity and independent growth of secret number-names.

The comparison will reveal that practically all the items listed in Tables 4.1, 4.3, 4.5 and 4.10 are in no way related to the corresponding items in Table 4.12. They appear to be cases of neologism and are not explicable by ordinary etymology. They do not have any written record and are passed on to the successive generations, and also to the new entrants into the profession through informal oral training.

There are, however, a few items in the number language of diamond dealers (number-names beyond 10), thugs (Table 4.11), *pandas* of Varanasi (Table 4.6) and *pandas* of Mathura (Table 4.8) which unmistakably reveal their indebtedness to the dominant language, namely Hindi.

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TABLE 4.12 NUMBER-NAMES IN SOME IMPORTANT INDIAN LANGUAGES

| | Number-Name in | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Hindi | Bengali | Punjabi | Sindhi | Marathi | Gujarati | Sanskrit | Oriya | Kashmiri |
| 1 | ek | ek | hik | hiku | ek | ek | eka | ekɔ | akh |
| 2 | do | dui | do | bbā | don | be | dwi | dui | zuh |
| 3 | tin | tin | tin | te | tin | tan | tri | tīni | trae |
| 4 | cār | cāri | cār | cāri | cār | cār | catur | cāri | tsor |
| 5 | pānc | pānc | panj | panja | pāc | panc | pancan | pānco | pant |
| 6 | chah | choy | che | cha | sahā | cha | śaś | cho | sheh |
| 7 | sāt | sāt | sāt | sāta | sāt | sāt | saptam | sato | sat |
| 8 | āth | āth | ath | atha | ath | ath | asttam | atho | at |
| 9 | nau | noy | naun | nanvan | nau | nav | navam | nū | naon |
| 10 | das | daś | das | dahā | dahā | das | dasam | dosho | dah |

TABLE 4.13 SECRET NUMBER-NAMES DERIVED FROM HINDI

| Name of the Group | Secret Number-Name | Number-Name in Hindi | Number Referred to |
|---|---|---|---|
| Diamond Dealers | nahali | nō | 9 |
| | gyagar | gyārah | 11 |
| | babar | bārah | 12 |
| | tirpar | terah | 13 |
| | cōpar | cōdah | 14 |
| Thugs | pancchuri | pānc | 5 |
| | cheru | che | 6 |
| | sathune | sāt | 7 |
| | desur | das | 10 |
| *Pandas* of Varanasi | pānro | pānc | 5 |
| | athū | āth | 8 |
| | nakkhū | nō | 9 |
| | landar | pandrah | 15 |
| *Pandas* of Kashi Karwat | thahā | āth | 8 |
| | nakkhu | nō | 9 |
| | dasai | das | 10 |
| *Pandas* of Mathura | dukari | do | 8 |
| | panjā | pānc | 5 |

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The argot number-names shown in Table 4.13 have all been derived from the dominant language Hindi but have been given a new look by phonological mutilations of various kinds, i.e., substitution, deletion, addition and transposition of sounds at various levels.

There are a few secret number-names commonly used by groups belonging to the same profession or place. This evidently reveals borrowing at either end.

TABLE 4.14 SOME COMMOM NUMBER-NAMES

| *Common Number-Name* | *Number Signified* | *Groups Using it* |
|---|---|---|
| *sāng* | 1 | Silk merchants, *pandas* of Varanasi and Allahabad. |
| *fok* | 4 | silk merchants, fruit merchants, *pandas* of Varanasi and Allahabd. |
| *bud* | 5 | Silk merchants, fruit merchants. |
| *pēnt* | 7 | Silk merchants, fruit merchants. |
| *salāy* | 10 | Silk merchants, *pandas* of Varanasi and Allahabad. |
| *sut* | 25 | Silk merchants, diamond dealers, *pandas* of Varanasi. |

Sometimes a number is commonly used by more than one group but not in the same sense. *Māsā* which in the argot of silk merchants means 25 paise or a quarter-rupee signifies the number 25 in the argot of Banarsi *pandas*. *Jaulay* is the secret number name for 12 in the silk merchants' language but the same term stands for 11 in the speech of fruit merchants.

Among sources from which the *pandas* of Banaras have derived their number-names and, in fact, several other words as well, the most striking is the argot of river *thugs* called *pingus* who operated between Allahabad and Patna more than a hundred years ago. The resemblance between the two has already been discussed in detail in an earlier paper by me (Mehrotra 1973), and here I shall concentrate only on the number-names. Table 4.15 gives a list of number-names from the speech of Banarasi *pandas*, which are derived from the argot of *thugs* (Sleeman 1836).

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TABLE 4.15 NUMBER-NAMES OF BANARASI PANDAS DERIVED FROM THE ARGOT OF THUGS

| *Speech of Pandas* | | *Speech of Thugs* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Number-Name* | *Number Signified* | *Corresponding Term* | *Meaning* |
| *jawar* | 2 | *jhawar* | a pair of jars in which Ganges water is carried |
| *singhārā* | 3 | *singhoṛe* | 3 |
| *ponchari* | 5 | *pancharuh* | 5 |
| *sut* | 20 | *sutli* | Rs 20 |

This parallelism together with the similarity of other items in the two groups confirms the *thugi* role of the vast majority of *pandas* (see chapter 2).

In keeping with the Indian tradition of expressing numerals through symbols some of the secret number-names covered in this study are also made to represent specific numbers because of their symbolic significance. Thus in the argot of Banarasi *pandas* and of *thugs*, *singhārā* which in Hindi means a waternut is the number-name for three, obviously because of the three-pointed tips of the fruit[3]. Among some sections of the criminal world of West Bengal, number 7 has been given the argot name pistol for the same reason as the two present identical visual images. In the number-language of *pandas* of Mathura *riśi* is the number name for seven as there are said to be seven *riśi* (sages) in Indian mythology and also a group of steps known as *saptarsi* (great bear). In the same scale *vasu* stands for number eight since it signifies a group of eight gods; and *grah* stands for number nine as there are said to be nine *grahas* (planets) in Indian astronomy. A rather unusual case is that of number three which *pandas* of Mathura have named *netra* (eye). Ordinarily *netra* should represent the number two but the reason why it is made to signify number three is not easy to understand unless it is intended to stupefy the people as is often the aim of most secret languages.

Now, who are the people using secret number-sequences and what are the situations which prompt their use ? Let us first take the number-names used by silk merchants. It is to be

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remembered that every member engaged in the silk industry is not conversant with this private code. It is, for instance, not known to the vast majority of weavers who are mostly drawn from the Muslim community. It is used on the one hand, by retail shopkeepers, wholesale dealers known as *kothidars* and their professional assistants, and on the other hand, by the middlemen called *dalals* (brokers). A *dalal* makes use of this code while talking to a fellow *dalal* or to a *kothidar* especially in the presence of outsiders. His purpose is to settle the price of a given piece with the shopkeeper; to find out the total number of articles bought and the amount paid by a customer, on which he would later collect his commission called *dalali*. The *kothidar* makes use of the secret number-names while discussing with his associates the maximum price to be fixed for a given article in *satti* (market place, particularly during the busy hours of buying and selling) within the hearing of the seller (weaver) not conversant with the code; while disclosing the cost price of an article to his assistant handling a customer. Suppose the weaver demands Rs 120 for a silk sari and the initial price offered on behalf of the *kothidar* is Rs 80, either the *kothidar* or his wholesale customer sitting there will utter *lagwārā* meaning hundred. This is a hint to the bidder to go upto Rs 100 before dismissing the article finally. The secret number-names may also be used to convey the number of saris and other articles bought or sold in a given situation and also to denote the number of customers engaged or expected on a particular day. Again, when the *kothidar* wants his assistant to bring a certain amount of money from a given source, the amount is uttered in the secret number-names.

The fruit and vegetables merchants make use of the secret number code in the local wholesale market also called *satti* where they assemble generally in the morning to sell and buy big quantity of fruits and vegetables after a good deal of bargaining. Often packages and bundles are put to auction and the whole atmosphere is charged with stiff competition. Parties desiring to buy a certain item discuss in secret code approximate maximum price to be offered in the process of bidding. Also, in the retail market when the fruit and vegetables vendors discuss among themselvs the cost price or the sale proceeds of a certain package of fruits, etc., they take recourse to secret number words though the rest of their utterance is drawn from the

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local form of the ordinary language. Thus when a fruit merchant talking to a fellow dealer says *"javar note aur majhi kā lehle hain"*, it means that he has bought that package for Rs 28 *(jawar note*=20+*majhi*=8).

Diamond dealers switch over to the codified number-names while discussing with their associates, fellow dealers and *dalals* the price of a given article. Their method is highly economical too. Thus, the number-name *buli* will stand for 7,700, 7000 and so on depending on the nature of the article being valued and discussed and subsequently avoiding heavier tax on money.

*Pandas'* use of secret number-names is confined to the situations not much different from those described above. Secret number names are used when a chief *panda* called *cimādā* instructs his subordinates to charge a certain amount of money from a particular client or a group of clients; when the subordinate *panda* communicates to his chief the total income made from a particular client or on a particular day; when different categories of *pandas* discuss or settle their respective shares in a given deal and finally when pilgrims are to be sold from one *panda* to another. Thus when a *panda* addressing his chief says *"javar raiyā selale hau"*, it means the pilgrim has paid Rs 2 to him; or when he says *"kharda mājhi hauvan"*, it signifies "there are fifty pilgrims in all". There is, however, a striking dissimilarity between the use of secret number-names by *pandas* and those by silk merchants, fruit merchants, diamond dealers, and others. Whereas in the case of the latter only the number-names are secret, the rest of the utterance being drawn from the ordinary language, the former, i. e., *pandas*, use their secret number-names embedded in an utterance which is no less secret and private and suits their underworld activity.

An important distinguishing feature of the secret series of number-names is its limited applicability. Unlike the popular number-sequence the secret number-sequence is not independent of things. It cannot be applied universally to count any kind of object. Only specific things can go with corresponding specific number scales. The number-sequence of silk merchants, for instance, can be used to count money, saries, customers; it will not be used to count oranges or the clothes given to the washerwoman at home. The number-sequence of diamond dealers, likewise, is used exclusively to tell or settle the price of a diamond or

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some such precious stone. It will not be used to settle the price of a silk brocade. If a diamond dealer also happens to be a silk merchant, he will be using two different sets of number-names in the two situations. The number-sequence of fruit merchants is meant to refer to money only. It cannot be used to count the number of fruits or their packages. The various number sets used by *pandas* are also restricted to counting money and sometimes the number of pilgrims in a given situation.

In some case the concept of money is implied in the number name itself, the two being fused together as it were. In the language of silk merchants *bajna* means "one rupee", for fruit merchants *note* only means "ten rupees" (although in India currency notes range in denomination from 1 to 100) and *ghonghā* means 100 rupees. For *pandas* of Varanasi *māsā* means 25 rupees while for *pandas* of Mathura *asli* (real) stands for one hundred rupees. In all these cases the designation of rupee is inseparably tied to the number referred to. The situation is analogous to the one found among Fiji islanders for whom *bola* means 10 boats but *koro* means 10 coconuts (Menninger 1969: 11), a befitting example of complete fusion of the "number and the object into a single entity".

The number scales under reference have varying maximum limits for which secret number-names are available. The Table 4.16 is illustrative of this.

TABLE 4.16 Maximum Limits of Secret Number-Names

| *Name of the Group* | *Maximum Numerical Limit* | *Corresponding Number-Name* |
|---|---|---|
| Silk Merchants | 100000 | *lakari* |
| Thugs | 10000 | *dascade* |
| Fruit Merchants | 100 | *ghonghā* |
| *Pandas* of Varanasi | 100 | *sambhal* |
| *Pandas* of Mathura | 100 | *asli* |
| Diamond Dealers | 20 | *sut* |
| *Pandas* of Kashi Karvat | 10 | *dasain* |
| *Pandas* of Gaya | 5 | *barmhāt* |

The limit, it will be seen, varies from group to group in accordance with their respective professional requirement. "The

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entire life of a peasant", says Conant (1923:35), "might be passed without his ever having occasion to use a number as great as 500". As regards the groups mentioned in Table 4.16 the number scale of silk merchants tops the list. Any number upto the numerical unit of one lakh (1,00,000) can be communicated in this secret code. No other profession or community, to my knowledge, has a system of secret number-names extending upto the sixth order of numbers. This is also in keeping with the requirement of the silk industry which deals with rather expensive items. On the other extreme is the secret number scale of Gayawal *pandas* consisting of independent number-names only upto five (*barmhat)*, subsequent numbers being named with a variety of compoundings of specific elements (which we will discuss later in this paper). This quinary system of number-names is one of the very few of its kind still in existence and use, originating as it were from the ancient practice of counting on one hand only, the other hand being engaged holding as weapon, in the present instance presumably a lethal weapon. This is a matter of considerable anthromorphemic interest. An important feature of this scale is the repetition of a number-name even before reaching 10 in order to form a higher number-name by combining the earlier units (see Table 4.9). The numeral scheme of Gayawal *pandas* compares well with the Kamilaroi scale in Australia where numerals are (Conant 1923:26):

1. mal
2. bular
3. guliba
4. bular bular
5. bular guliba
6. guliba guliba

As a matter of fact, with the sole exception of the quinary system of Gayawal *pandas*, the base of numeration in all the secret number scales under reference is 10 with stray instances of monomorphic words, i.e., *landar* (for 15 used by *pandas* of Varanasi), *sut* (for 20 used by silk merchants), *māsā* (for 25 used by *pandas* of Varanasi), *adhākur* (for 50 used by *pandas* of Gaya), *lagwārā* (for 100 used by silk merchants), *asli* (for 100 used by *pandas* of Mathura), *sambhal* (for 100 used by *pandas* of Varanasi), *tāt* (for 100 used by silk merchants) and *lakarī* (for 1,00,000 used by silk merchants). The underlying principle is the same as that of the

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most Indo-European languages in which we have independent number-words upto ten, beyond which all our numerals, with few exceptions, are compounds and combinations of basic number-names added with some phonological string. Numerals in other words, are of two types—compound and non-compound (Yoshitake 1968:53).[6] The non-compound numerals in a given scale are those morphemes which stand on their own without combination of any other morpheme. The compound numeral, on the other hand, is the result of combination of more than one number-word. Formation of a number-name higher than the base follows a somewhat fixed procedure in a given scale although the procedure may differ substantially from scale to scale. The traditional mode of arrangement in Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chinese and some other languages has been that "when a number is composed of the first two denominations only, that is, for numbers below hundred, the smaller element is written first" (Dutta 1927:531). Thus the number-names thirteen, fourteen, fifteen in English and corresponding Hindi terms *terah*, *cōdah*, *pandrah* are "contractions of the fuller expressions three-and-ten, four-and-ten, five-and-ten".

The same arrangement is seen in the number scale of silk merchants (Table 4.1).

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *iklāy* | = | one-ten | *dahaklāy* | = | six-ten |
| *jaulāy* | = | two-ten | *pēntlāy* | = | seven-ten |
| *rakhlāy* | = | three-ten | *manglāy* | = | eight-ten |
| *foklāy* | = | four-ten | *konlāy* | = | nine-ten |
| *budlāy* | = | five-ten | | | |

The number scale of diamond dealers adheres to the same pattern.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *gyāgar* | = | one-ten | *pālo birāyate* | = | five added (to ten) |
| *bābar* | = | two-ten | *citti birāyate* | = | six added (to ten) |
| *tirpar* | = | three-ten | *bʊli birāyate* | = | seven added (to ten) |
| *cōpar* | = | four-ten | *nahli birāyate* | = | nine added (to ten) |

In the scales just cited the numerals from 11 to 19 are formed by prefixing the smaller number to the base, which in the present instance happens to be 10. The pattern, however, is not consistent

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in all the number scales being studied here. The sequence from 11 to 19 in the fruit merchants' scale shows a somewhat haphazard pattern:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *jaulāy* | = | one-ten | *note ōr fok* | = | ten-four |
| *baraswāy* | = | two-ten | *note ōr bud* | = | ten-five |
| *note or rag* | = | ten-three | | | |

I am not in a position to make similar analysis in regard to the number scales used by *thugs* and *pandas* as I have not been able to collect all the number-names beyond ten in these cases.

The quinary number scale of Gayawal *pandas* is of special interest in an analysis of this kind. There is hardly a number scale, popular or private, which shows greater inconsistency of pattern than the one patronised by Gayawal *pandas*. A casual glance at the formation of the following five number-names (from six to ten) will reveal that even in a small sequence we get random instances of both addition and multiplication without any fixed scheme of arrangement:

6 *jognā singhārā* (2×3): multiplication
7 *jognā singhārā sāng* (2×3+1): multiplication and addition
8 *jognā kusōr* (2×4): multiplication
9 *jognā kusōr sāng* (2 × 4+1): multiplication and addition
10 *jognā barmhāt* (2×5): multiplication.

Apparently the number-names built up by combination of two words (*jognā singhārā* or *jognā barmhāt*) are formed by multiplication whereas those consisting of three words (*jognā singhārā sāng* or *jognā kusōr sāng*) have this arrangement. The first two elements are multiplied and the third one is added to the total. This appears to be a unique system in the history of numbers.

It will be noticed that in the number scale of silk merchants (Table 4.1) the number-names from 14 to 19 (i.e., *foklāy, budlāy, dahaklāy, manglāy, konlāy*) are formed by taking its first element *fok, bud, dahak, pēnt, mang* and *kon* exactly in the same form in which they are used to denote the numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 respectively. If the same principle was adhered to in the formation of number-names for 11, 12 and 13, we should have, for the sake of consistency, the number-names *sānglāy, swānlāy*, and

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*ikwāi lāy, sāng, swān,* and *ikwāi* denoting 1, 2 and 3 respectively. But this is not so, and we have instead *iklāy, jaulāy,* and *rakhlāy.* The same irregularity is noticeable in identical series used by the diamond dealers (Table 4.3) and fruit merchants (Table 4.5). The pattern here is analogous to the one found in English numeral system where *eleven* and *twelve* are not formed on the same principle as *sixteen, seventeen, eighteen,* etc.

## Variant Forms

In a few cases we have alternative variant forms for the same number-name. Each of the number-names beyond *sūt* (20) in the silk merchant's lingo can be expressed in any of the three forms given below. Each variant adheres to a different style of combination:

1. By adding *ūpar* meaning above as in *fok ūpar swān dahaj* (4 above 20), *mang ūpar bud dahaj* (8 above 50), *pēnt ūpar kon kon dahāi* (7 above 90).
   The linking word '*ūpar*' is used for forming number-names above 20 even in the secret number-language of diamond dealers (Table 4.3 and 4.4) with the difference that *ūpar* here precedes the unit rather than the decade morpheme as in the case with the silk merchants. The following illustrations from the diamond dealers' lingo will show the contrast: *sūt ūpar iron* (20 above 4); *sūt pādahāi ūpar thāl* (50 above 8); and *nahali dahāi ūpar būli* (90 above 7).
   A somewhat similar method is followed by the fruit and vegetable merchants who denote addition by *ōr* (and) rather than *ūpar* (above): *note ōr rag* (10 and 3); *note ōr fok* (10 and 4); and *note ōr bud* (10 and 5).
2. By combining the decade morpheme with decimal denominator *dahāi* (ten) and unit in that order as in *swān dahāi fok* (two ten four) and *bud dahāi mang* (five ten eight).
3. By combining decade with unit in that order without mentioning decimal denominator or any other linking word. Here the digits are altered in the order in which they are written: *swān fok* (two four)—24; *bud mang* (five eight)—58 and *kon pēnt* (nine seven)—97.
   Some like Pandit (1972: 27) may not like to call *swān fok*

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a number-name and would rather describe it as "dictation label for number-names". But in the trade talk of silk merchants this is freely, and in fact more frequently, used as a number-name by its own right.

The number-language of diamond dealers has some special features peculiar to it. Perhaps the most interesting feature is the lack of independent basic number-names in it for one, two, three, and five which in the present instance are formed by naming a number four times higher and then adding an allomorph *pā* denoting *pāv* or a quarter. Thus we have:

1. *airan pā* (quarter of *airan*, i.e., four)—one
2. *thāl pā* (quarter of *thāl*, i.e., eight)—two
3. *bābarpā* (quarter of *bābar*, i.e., twenty)—three
4. *sūt pā* (quarter of *sūt*, i.e., twenty)—five

This appears to be a unique system. I wonder if there is any other number scale which does not have independent number names for the first two or three numerals. This device, besides contributing to the economy in number language, also facilitates expression of some fractional numbers which when doubled or redoubled constitute a plain, non-fractional number in the scale. The following are illustrative:

1¼ *pāle pā* (quarter of five)
1½ *citti pā* (quarter of six)
1¾ *būli pā* (quarter of seven)
2¼ *nahali pā* (quarter of nine)
2½ *dhot pā* (quarter of ten)
2¾ *gyāgar pā* (quarter of eleven)

Another unusual feature of the number scale of diamond dealers is the use of a particle *birāyate* (meaning added) as a suffix while framing number-names from fifteen to nineteen:

*pālo birāyate* (five added)—15
*citti birāyate* (six added)—16
*būli birāyate* (seven added)—17
*thāl birāyate* (eight added)—18
*nahali birāyate* (nine added)—19

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*Birāyate* is obviously a coinage specially belonging to the slang of diamond dealers.

Sometimes the secret number-names are distorted in a variety of ways so as to give them a familiar look and avoid any impression in the mind of hearers that things are being kept secret from them. We shall illustrate this from the number-language of silk merchants. It is customary with them to disguise the secret number-names as personal names either in the form of address or references and the hint is unmistakably received by the person for whom it is intended. The examples given in Table 4.17 clearly illustrate this technique of double disguise.

TABLE 4.17 NUMBER-NAMES SUBJECTED TO DOUBLE DISGUISE

| *Number* | *Secret Number-Name* | *Disguised as a Personal Name* |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | *ikwāi* | Ikwai chand |
| 4 | *fok* | Foku lal |
| 5 | *bud* | Budhu Mal |
| 6 | *dahak* | Dahaku Das |
| 7 | *pēnt* | Pentu |
| 8 | *mang* | Mangu Das |
| 10 | *jaulāy* | Jaulayji |
| 12 | *rakhlāy* | Rakhlay Mal |
| 20 | *sūt* | Sutji |

Suppose a weaver/seller at *satti* has been offered Rs 110 as the price of a silk sari by the *kothidar* and the offer has been rejected by the weaver/seller. Now, if the wholesale merchant sitting there is anxious to get that piece by offering another Rs 10, he will give the hint by saying any of these sentences:

*Sutji kā kyā hāl hē?* (How is Sutji?)
*Sutji ko bulā di jiye* (Please call Sutji)
*Yeh nahin lenā hē, Sutji* (Don't want to take this, Sutji)

*Sut*, it is to be remembered, is the secret number-name for 20 and becomes doubly disguised when personified as *Sutji*.

Practically all the sets of secret number-names included in this study suffer in comparison with the ordinary number-names for

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want of flexibility of use and varied applicability. None of the secret number-names can be used as ordinals which in Hindi are generally formed by adding the suffix *thān* as in *chathān* (sixth) or *vān* as in *pāncavān* (fifth). As regards fractionals, we do not have terms to denote what in Hindi are labelled *pāv*, i.e., quarter (except in the diamond dealers' lingo), *pōna*, i.e., three quarter and *savā* i.e., a quarter. The only fractional which is commonly used by silk merchants, fruit merchants, and *pandas* is *tal* equivalent of the Hindi term *sārhe* to denote "a half" as in the expression *talikwāi* (3½) or *tal saloy* (10½). It is, however, to be noted that whereas the prefix *sārhe* in the ordinary Hindi numeral system cannot be used with *ek* (one) and *do* (two) for which we have specific terms *derh* (1½) and *arhai* (2½) respectively, *tal* in the secret number-language of silk merchants can be added to any number from one to one million, thus making it at least in this respect, more scientific than the ordinary Hindi number-names. Furthermore, there is no provision in the secret number scales for expressing either proportionals (as in *dogunā*, i.e., two times) or multiplicatives (as in *dobārā*, i.e., twice). The provision for expressing a totality by using a number-name in inflected plural form is also negligible in the secret number lexicon. Whereas most of the numerals in Hindi can be used as aggregatives by taking the termination *on* as in *caron* (all the four) or *barahon* (all the twelve), none of the secret number-names being studied here can be used in this fashion except the first three number names in the silk merchants' lingo (*sāng-sāngon, swān-swāno, ikwāi-ikwāion*). Zero is also conspicuous by its absence in all the number sets examined here.

## Esoteric Finger Counting

One of the practical and, according to some, "primitive" methods of counting, known universally, has been finger counting which Tylor (1958: 247) has termed as "hand numerals" or "digit numerals". The relationship of finger counting and the origin of our number systems is already an established fact. "It is to his articulate ten fingers" says Dantzig (1962:10), "that man owes his success in calculations". Quite a few number-names in our living languages can be traced back to finger origin. Number "5" for instance is termed as *paṇca* in Sanskrit, *pānc* in Hindi,

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*pentca* (the outstretched hand) in Persian, *piat* in Russian (from *piast* meaning the outstretched hand) all being overtly related to five fingers. *Panja, panrho, pochari, hatthu,* and *barmhat* in the various tables given in this study also make symbolic use of hand to denote number "five". Incidentally we here see the same word used for "five" as well as "hand". Incidentaly, in the Roman system of written numerals the figures I, II, III, and earlier IIII resemble the shape of fingers when used to denote corresponding numbers.

Finger counting is of two types: public and private. Whereas the former is known universally as when someone instinctively shows two fingers to a bearer in a restaurant while asking for two cups of tea, the latter is known only to certain specific communities and used mainly in secret commercial dealings. We are concerned in this study with the second type of finger counting which, in fact, is an important aspect of mercantile sign language. This consists of snipping and manipulating each other's fingers hidden under a piece of cloth or a fold of garment for secretly bargaining the price of an article. I shall confine my analysis to the finger counting of this type only as it is practised by the diamond dealers of Varanasi, although the method has been in vogue since long not only in India (in the trading of horses, pearls, cloth, etc.), but also in the seaports and market places of the Red Sea, Arabia, East Africa (Menninger 1969:212) and China (Smeltzer 1967:26). Several scholarly references have been made to this in the past. Jean Gabriel Lemoine has given a well documented account of the three Oriental systems of finger counting used by traders in near and far East (Lemoine 1932: 1-60). Some travellers of repute like Tavernier, Vartthema and Fryer have also given graphic description of a custom—'dumb barter'—which was particularly popular in horse dealing (Crooke 1919: 462).

The esoteric finger counting among the diamond dealers of Varanasi is known as *hatthā* (the languages of hand), though *anguli ki dalali* (brokerage by finger, literally) is another popular term for this. *Hatthā*, which, in fact, is an artificial development of ordinary finger counting presupposes a situation in which the buyer and the seller of a diamond or a precious stone are engaged in transactions involving a good deal of secret bargaining in the presence of by-standers and other dealers from whom the prices being offered and finally agreed upon are to be kept concealed.

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Both the buyer and the seller extend their right hands over which one of them casts a towel or a shawl or the end of his *dhoti*. Each finger has a specific numeral rank or signification which is either known to both the parties in advance or is specified at the outset. The specification of unit of transaction is done by grasping the index finger and saying, *yeh rupiya hē* (this is rupee) if the unit be one rupee. If the unit is intended to be ten, the words are *yeh dahāi hē*; if a hundred, *yeh sō hē*; if a thousand *yeh hazār hē*. Quarter of a unit is the lowest fraction and is expressed by drawing a line with the forefinger on the palm of the other person's hand; two quarters or half a unit by drawing two such lines; three quarters by drawing three lines. The sense of $+\frac{1}{2}$ is communicated by stroking the index finger from the tip to the middle joint knuckle while the meaning of $-\frac{1}{2}$ is conveyed by stroking the same finger from the middle joint upwards towards the tip. The finger language is thus capable of expressing fractions commonly used in bargaining.

Thus, if the seller's hand is holding the buyer's index finger stretched out, his other fingers being closed, this means 1, 10, 100, 1000, 10,000 rupees. If the seller touches the buyer's two first fingers, this means 2, 20, 200, 2,000, 20,000. Corresponding signification is attached for grasping of three, four and five fingers. While expressing 6, 60, 600, 60,000, 6,00,000 the seller will first grasp all the five fingers, release them for a second and then grasp one more finger. Corresponding series beginning with 7, 8 and 9 will be communicated by holding two, three and four fingers respectively after holding and releasing the full hand first.

There are some alternative methods for expressing the series beyond four. One such method, which also aims at greater secrecy, for expressing 5, 50,500, 50,000, 5,00,000 rupees is to gently press the centre of the palm. An alternative device for expressing 6, 60, 6,000, 6,00,000 is to grasp the three fingers twice. Likewise 8, 80, 800, 80,000 and 8,00,000 rupees are communicated by grasping the four fingers twice. The series 6, 600, 6,000, 6,00,000 can also be indicated by yet another method which requires the communicator to draw a line with his index finger on the edge of the receiver's little finger. Drawing a line twice and thrice in this manner signifies 7, 70, 700, 7,000, 70,000 and 8, 80, 800, 8,000, 80,000 respectively. There is yet another method of indicating the series from six onward. Grasping the little finger alone signi-

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fies 6, 60, 600, 60,000, 6,00,000; the ring finger alone 7, 70, 700, 7,000, 7,00,000, and subsequently the middle finger alone means 8, 80, 800, 8,000, 8,00,000. An interesting way to indicate 9, 90, 900, 9,000, 9,00,000 is to grasp the index finger of the buyer and bend it slightly.

Suppose a buyer wishes to offer Rs 2540 for an article for which the seller has demanded Rs 3000. To communicate this in *hatthā* he will first hold the seller's two fingers to denote two units or two sums of a thousand rupees. He will simultaneously be indicating the unit with words *yeh hajār hē* (This is thousand). Then he will grasp all the five fingers saying *yeh sō hē* (This is hundred). Next, he will grasp four fingers saying *yeh dahāi hē* (This is the unit of ten); the whole indicating the amount as Rs 2540. In every subsequent grasp the value of the finger drops to a unit lower in rank, i.e., from Rs 1,000 to Rs 100, and then to Rs 10 and so on. This succession of numerical ranks is an essential part of the finger language under reference.

It is important to say a word here regarding the nature of bargaining between the buyer and the seller. It is implied that the initial price demanded by the seller is always an exhorbitant figure and the price offered by the buyer in the first instance is rather a lengthy one, usually wrapt in excessive excitement as the seller gradually moves downward and buyer upward. Tylor (1958:246) catches something of the spirit of this kind of bargaining in the following words: "It is said that between two brokers settling a price by thus snipping with the fingers, cleverness in bargaining, offering a little more, hesitating, expressing an obstinate refusal to go further, etc., are as clearly indicated as though the bargaining were being carried on in words".

*Hatthā*, the commercial finger language described above, is thus a useful device of settling the price of an article by stiff bargaining in complete privacy. The element of privacy in *hatthā* is far greater than in all sets of secret number-names discussed. Secret number-names when utterred can be understood by all the in-group members present in a given situation as all are conversant with the code and the words are distinctly audible to them. But the case is different in *hatthā*. Here even an in-group member, well-familiar with the code cannot understand the communication that is taking place as it is essentially a non-verbal act

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completely concealed under a piece of cloth. It is precisely a "dialogue" in the literal sense of the term.

Yet another advantage of *hatthā* is its utility as a means of communication between persons not conversant with each other's language. With its help, the Hindi speaking jewellers of Varanasi are able to negotiate their business transactions with Tamil speaking jewellers of Madras in spite of the language barrier existing between the two parties. Moreover, *hatthā* which insists on direct face to face dealing rules out the necessity of an untrustworthy interpreter between the two merchants not understanding each other's mother tongue. Of late, the wholesale fruit merchants of Varanasi have also come upon using *hatthā* as it facilitates silent and secret transactions in the open air market in the midst of a good deal of noise and confusion that characterize it.

The study of the secret language of numbers, both verbal and non-verbal, in the context of culture provides a fascinating area for future researchers. The present study is rather a tentative attempt in this direction. In the evolutionary proceess of number concept in the ordinary day-to-day language, the concrete is said to have preceded the abstract. But the process appears to have been reversed in the case of esoteric number language. Here it is the abstract which in most cases precedes the concrete. If the secret number systems do not conform to a consistent pattern, this is because they have not been devised by a scientific planner. The choice in most cases has been either accidental or arbitrary. Nevertheless, the extent and variety of number names bear testimony to the remarkable ingenuity of the groups using them. It is amazing how, without any written record, they have managed to survive for more than a century strictly adhering to the oral tradition. The study also gives an insight into what Halliday calls "a functional perspective of language" with its various implications pertaining to the specialized uses of the number language. The secret number-names besides being "a microcosm of the language complex" also emerge in the final analysis as cultural items par excellence and hence inseparable from the sociocultural texture and context of the group which uses them.

## Notes

1. A similar paucity of numeral has been observed in several native

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dialects of South America, Polynesia, Bolivia, Greenland, Labrador, the negro tribes of Africa, and the northern part of Siberia.

2. The situations, however, would be different in Chinese which is said to be the only instance in the world where spoken number words and written numeral figures are identical.

3. The visual image which the written form of a number presents has often been exploited for purposes of comparison in our literature. In the famous work *Naishadh Charit* by Sri Harsh (*Sarga* 7, *Shloka* 63) the ear of Damayani has been likened to number nine as it is written.

4. This tendency for mystification is all the more prominent in the whole sale milk market of Varanasi where the seller mentions a number which is required to be doubled by the buyer. Thus if the milk vendor wants to convey the rate of milk as 12 *chatak* (a chatak is one sixteenth of a *seer*) per rupee, he would be saying 6 *chatak* and the buyer knows that it actually stands for 12 *chatak*.

5, Elsewhere both rupees and paisa have been given special names to be affixed with the secret number-names of a professional group. The following Table contains a list of argot terms for rupees and paisa :

It is to be remembered that these terms, with the exception of *raiya* exclusively belong to the groups shown against them. The term *tulā* for rupee can go with any of the number-names used by *pandas* of Kashi Karwat and not with a number-name belonging to any other series. We can thus say *mahā tulā*, but we cannot say *swān tulā* or *thal pā tulā* or *javar tulā* although all the four terms *javar*, *swān*, *thāl pā* and *mahā* mean *two*. This is typical case of fixed collocation.

6. An alternative approach to the structural analysis of the morphemes for numerals in a given language has been suggested by Salzamann. He conceives of three general patterns underlying and determining the numeral systems: the frame pattern; the cyclic pattern; and the operative pattern. For details see Salzamann (1950: 78-83).

7. *Pāo* by itself is often used to denote 'a quarter of a seer'. Grierson also gives *pa* as one of the variant forms of the fractional ¼ in Bhojpuri, an eastern colloquial dialect.

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# Appendix

The scheme of transliteration followed in the text is as follows :

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| अ a | आ ā | i | ई ī | उ u |
| ऊ ū | ए e | ऐ ē | ओ o | औ o |
| क k | ख kh | ग g | घ gh | ङ y |
| च c | छ ch | ज j | झ jh | ञ ñ |
| ट t | ठ th | ड d | ढ dh | ण ṇ |
| त t | थ th | द d | ध dh | न n |
| प p | फ ph | ब b | भ bh | म m |
| य y | र r | ल l | व v | ह h |
| श ś | स s | ड़ ṛ | ṛh | |

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